

Interpretation

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Department of Political Science
Baylor University
1 Bear Place, 97276
Waco, TX 76798
- email* interpretation@baylor.edu

Socrates's Spirited Defense of Knowledge: Continnence, Incontinence, and Human Action in Book VII of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

STEPHEN A. BLOCK

BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

steve_block@baylor.edu

PATRICK CAIN

LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY, ONTARIO

pncaain@lakeheadu.ca

Abstract: In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle provides the most famous account of moral virtue ever offered by a philosopher, but one that proves perplexing, not least because this account culminates in a depreciation of human virtue in Book VI. In light of this background, this essay provides a new interpretation of Aristotle's analysis in Book VII of the *Ethics* of the Socratic claim that no one "knowingly acts contrary to what is best." The authors contend that Aristotle shows that Socrates's thesis affirming the mastery of knowledge originates in a quest, rooted in spiritedness, to divinize the soul and transcend the limitations of mere human virtue. Accordingly, the essay links Aristotle's analysis of continence and incontinence to the problem of the relation between the human and the divine with which Aristotle introduces and concludes Book VII, as well as Aristotle's largely ignored account of spiritedness (*thumos*) in Book VII.

In the first six books of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle provides the most important account of moral virtue ever offered by a philosopher. This "treatise on virtue" nevertheless proves perplexing, above all because this account culminates in a depreciation of moral virtue and the human things in general at the conclusion of his discussion of virtue in Book VI, after which

Aristotle claims to begin anew with a discussion of new moral characteristics distinct from virtue. In light of this background, our essay provides a new interpretation of what immediately follows in the first half of Book VII of the *Ethics*, and specifically the Socratic claim raised and analyzed by Aristotle that no one knowingly acts contrary to what is best. We contend that Aristotle shows that Socrates's thesis affirming the mastery of knowledge in the continent originates in a quest, rooted in spiritedness, to divinize the soul and transcend the limitations of merely human virtue. As such, contrary to the view presented in most interpretations of Aristotle's work, continence appears not as an inferior form of moral virtue, but as a higher although problematic alternative to moral virtue. Accordingly, the essay links the analysis of incontinence to the problem of the relation between the human and the divine with which Aristotle introduces and concludes Book VII, and to Aristotle's largely ignored account of spiritedness (*thumos*) in Book VII.

At the opening of Book VII, Aristotle announces a new beginning to the inquiry into the good that Aristotle had taken up in the *Ethics*, first with an analysis of happiness (Book I), and then with a detailed accounting of virtue, both moral (Books II–V) and intellectual (Book VI). What is most evidently new about Book VII is the emergence of continence (*enkrateia*), which first appears as a kind of halfway house on the road to virtue. Whereas moral virtue entailed a harmonization of the soul's desires with what is best and proper through habituation (and vice the opposite: 1119a1–20),¹ Aristotle's discussion of continence and incontinence seems to acknowledge the experience most human beings struggle with: namely, that our desire for pleasure does battle with—and sometimes even overcomes—what we know to be best. In this, the new concern with continence and incontinence first appears as a concern with what is lower than virtue, for even if continence is achieved through the successful resistance of the desire for pleasure, the battle in the soul that it seems to involve makes it a lower form of goodness than that achieved by moral virtue. According to Tessitore, for instance, Book VII is a decline from the heights of moral virtue to the lower, more accessible target of continence.² In a similar vein, Burger argues that the discussion in Book

¹ All references to the *Nicomachean Ethics* are in parentheses. The translations are our own, but we have consulted the translations of Bartlett and Collins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) and Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926).

² Aristide Tessitore, *Reading Aristotle's "Ethics": Virtue, Rhetoric, and Political Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 52. See also Thomas W. Smith, *Revaluing Ethics: Aristotle's Dialectical Pedagogy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 180; and Lorraine Smith Pangle, "Virtue and Self-Control in Xenophon's Socratic Thought," in *Natural Right and Political Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Catherine Zuckert and Michael Zuckert*, ed. Ann Ward and Lee Ward (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2013), 16.

VII descends from the higher peak of philosophy that it achieved in Book VI in a way that reminds the reader of the philosopher's return to the cave in Book VII of Plato's *Republic*.³ One might be tempted to understand Book VII, then, as fulfilling the practical goal of the *Ethics* that its listeners become good; continence would seem to be a step on the way to moral virtue in its fullest form, and thus an incomplete form of virtue.

On the other hand, much of Aristotle's discussion of continence and incontinence is devoted to the examination of the Socratic paradox that no one with knowledge will act contrary to that knowledge, or that incontinence is an illusion and does not really exist. Socrates's position thus described makes correct action dependent on knowledge alone, with that knowledge providing the very thing that was lacking from the previous account of moral virtue. On this basis, continence would entail a kind of science of action, a knowledge from which right behavior could be *fully* derived. Virtue—newly understood as continence—would become knowledge and, as we shall see, would provide the very thing lacking from Aristotle's previous account of moral virtue, which was crucially dependent on the incorporation of the passions into the virtuous characteristics. In this way, continence appears to be a kind of peak beyond even the heights reached by moral virtue, for it holds out the possibility of taking fuller control of our lives than what was available within the life of moral virtue.

It is noteworthy that the same scholars who perceive a lowering of concern in Book VII also present Aristotle's analysis as indicating his agreement with the Socratic thesis and its implication that incontinence does not really exist.⁴ On this reading, although incontinence is experienced as the rule of desire over what we hold to be best, a closer examination reveals that its victory is really over "false" knowledge, or ignorance, or mere opinion, and not genuine knowledge. This denial of the existence of incontinence and the subsequent affirmation of continence is, in one sense, an optimistic interpretation

³ Ronna Burger, *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 132.

⁴ Tessitore, *Reading Aristotle's "Ethics,"* 56–57, defends the Socratic position by reading Aristotle to mean that the apparently incontinent person acts against potential rather than actual knowledge. Burger, *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates*, 138, 142, 151, also has Aristotle affirming the Socratic position, and says Aristotle views apparent instances of incontinence as really kinds of temporary ignorance caused by madness or drunkenness or sleep. See also David L. Schaefer, "Wisdom and Morality: Aristotle's Account of *Akrasia*," *Polity* 21 (1998): 245–247; and Leah Bradshaw, "Political Rule, Prudence and the Woman Question in Aristotle," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 24 (1991): 564–66. Whereas this scholarship for the most part understands the knowledge at stake to be prudential, our reading highlights the importance of scientific knowledge to Aristotle's account, and the importance of distinguishing it from prudence.

of the possibility of rationality achieving victory over the irrational or sub-rational. On the other hand it would also seem to mean that we are not morally responsible for our failings in the way that we often believe ourselves to be. Aristotle's putative agreement with Socrates would seem not only to further the depreciation of moral virtue, but also and more importantly to replace moral virtue with a new kind of virtue, governed by knowledge. This new virtue promises to be *the* source of right and good action, thereby pointing to an intellectual life that is superior to and distinct from the life of moral virtue.

The analysis provided in our essay takes a different approach. While we too think that Aristotle affirms the Socratic thesis as having these implications for incontinence, we also think that Aristotle's argument contains a subtle questioning of continence itself; his discussion offers little reason to think that continence can be achieved or that it is good. Aristotle shows that a continence that is superior or identical to virtue would require the possession of a scientific knowledge (*epistēmē*). This scientific knowledge would allow for continence insofar as "we all suppose that what we know scientifically does not admit of being otherwise" (1139b20). And if such a precise knowledge is possible, then it could become the foundation of right human action, for it could perfect the formerly less than exacting judgment of moral virtue under the guidance of prudence.⁵ It is therefore fitting that Aristotle begins and ends his presentation of continence and incontinence with a discussion of the place of the human in relation to the divine, for if a scientific knowledge of human action could be achieved, then it might even provide the grounds for human action to reach completion in a way that permits it to become an object of contemplation.

We will show, however, that although Aristotle's analysis of the Socratic thesis means to raise these possibilities, it is ultimately designed to demonstrate the difficulty of human beings achieving this scientific knowledge, or of using it to direct their actions. In other words, while we agree that his account of incontinence sides with the Socratic position insofar as it shows the impossibility of acting against scientific knowledge, we argue that his analysis also suggests the need to question the continence that that same scientific knowledge would require. Aristotle shows the need to question not only incontinence, but also the possibility of continence, and therefore to wonder whether our desire to bind science to human action is good. Underscoring and

⁵ Schaefer writes: "The start of Book VII entails not only a consideration of moral possibilities other than virtue and vice, but also a reconsideration of moral virtue itself, taking into account its newly articulated connection with prudence" ("Wisdom and Morality," 225).

illuminating this criticism, we argue, is Aristotle's consideration of the relationship between spiritedness (*thumos*) and reason as it appears in his often overlooked account of spirited incontinence which follows his analysis of the Socratic thesis. This feature of Aristotle's argument, we suggest, furthers his uncovering of both our desire for a science of action and the implications of our attempt to attain it. Aristotle means to disclose what an exacting or scientific knowledge of action would need, and what it would entail.

If we are right that continence undermines the integrity of moral virtue, Aristotle's questioning of the authority of scientific knowledge might leave a place for prudence, and therefore moral virtue, in the best *human* life. Book VII can thus be understood as Aristotle's attempt to moderate the quest to be divine at the expense of our humanity. We believe that this analysis helps uncover the light Book VII sheds on Aristotle's answer to the ultimate question of the *Ethics*: What is the good that is appropriate to us as human beings?

BOOK VII IN CONTEXT

Aristotle introduces the *Nicomachean Ethics* as an inquiry into the most choiceworthy end for human beings—what it is that will make human beings happy. Should we achieve knowledge of this good, writes Aristotle, we would better be able to hit on what is needed to achieve it. The inquiry is thus concerned not only with articulating what the highest end is, but also with discovering “to which of the sciences or capacities it belongs” (1094b26). Knowledge of what to pursue and how to pursue it would provide the source of proper action, and give us a measure of control over our lives. Aristotle thus repeatedly throughout the *Ethics* emphasizes the practical nature of the investigation—that the end being sought by the inquiry is not to know what is good, but to become good.

After a series of apparent digressions in the first half of Book I, Aristotle proceeds in chapter 7 to determine “in outline” what kind of activity and what kind of life would constitute the good of happiness, articulating two criteria that we divine about this good. This good must be final and it must be self-sufficient: useless for anything else (1097b1–2), and in need of nothing else (1097b7–17). Reconciling these two principles, however, proves difficult. Understanding the good as an activity that is done for the sake of nothing else, and more importantly, for the sake of which we do *all* other things, permits us to understand the goodness of other things inasmuch as they contribute to and provide the means for the highest good or activity.

The good understood in this way provides the principle of the good's unity. However, explaining the goodness of these lower activities in light of the best requires positing the dependence of that best activity on what is inferior to it, thereby bringing into question the self-sufficiency of that good. Alternatively, if thought were to provide wholly for itself, without dependence on any other thing or action, that would leave nothing to explain why or for what reason human beings act at all. Aristotle's first account of the good would therefore seem to leave us at a crossroads, unable to reconcile necessity of action with a theoretical account of the good.

It is appropriate, then, that Aristotle proceeds in the remainder of I.7 to determine what happiness for a human being specifically entails by looking for what work or function (*ergon*) is "fitting" to a human being. Just as we identify "every expert" as good or bad in accordance with whether he performs the function or work assigned to him well, so we might discover the good of the human being by discovering the proper function of the human being. In so doing, Aristotle immediately excludes having life and perception as these belong to plants and animals as well. What belongs to human beings, Aristotle concludes, is "some practice of one possessing reason [*logos*]" (1098a4–5). Some type of rational activity is the human work, but this definition of the human work is nevertheless complicated by what reason (*logos*) is for a human being. Human reason is not a seamless whole but rather divides into a part "having [reason] and thinking" and another that "obeys reason" or is "persuaded" by reason. In this outline of the human work provided here, Aristotle thus leaves unspecified whether simple life and sensation are excluded because they are activities belonging also to beings *lower* than human or whether they are not specific and *peculiar* to human beings alone.

This question is suppressed at the end of Book I by Aristotle's account of the soul. Aristotle here divides the soul into a rational and nonrational part, with the former dividing into a part that has reason "in itself," and an appetitive part that is rational inasmuch as it listens to reason, "like a son listens to his father" (1103a4). This division of *logos* allows virtue to be divided into intellectual and ethical components, which are the excellences of each part. However, as has been noted by others, Aristotle does not articulate the relationship between these two parts. He does not say what part of the soul enables the rational part to give commands to the part that listens and obeys, and so leaves the reader to wonder how the "rational part" that is not reason

in itself is related at all to reason itself.⁶ The indeterminacy of the parts of the soul not only leaves the relationship between the rational parts ambiguous, it also allows for the introduction of an external standard of right reason to work on the soul.⁷

This ambiguity in the soul prefigures a new division of the parts of the soul that precedes his account of the intellectual virtues in Book VI. There the rational part is divided in twain again, although not between the appetitive part that obeys right reason and the thinking part whose function remains indeterminate, but ultimately between a part of thought that comprehends the unchanging, necessary, and eternal beings, the virtue of which is wisdom (*sophia*), and a part that comprehends those things about which we can deliberate and that are thus not necessary, the virtue of which is prudence (*phronēsis*) (1139a6–20). This division originates in the need for right reason within the soul that was absent from the account of the soul in Book I; for something to command and guide the appetitive part; for some sort of knowledge to provide the missing principle of right reason for action. Prudence would seem to answer this need, since its function is to give commands, to tell us what to do in particular.

But prudence as the ruling virtue of the soul proves problematic in two ways. First, prudence as ruler is dependent on moral virtue, for without the desire for the proper and noble end, prudence is reduced to cleverness or terribleness, which is identical to prudence in being able to deliberate well about means to given ends (1144a20–24). Only if the end is right can excellent deliberation be prudence, but prudence does not provide the end. Its dependence on moral virtue for that end would undermine its claim to be the ruling virtue of the soul.

This problem produces a second perplexity that reflects a concern raised by Aristotle at the end of Book I about the ruling principle of the soul. If prudence only reasons about the means to the end then it would not seem to be necessary to a human being fulfilling his or her good. In place of having prudence in the soul, an actor could simply obey a prudent person and achieve

⁶ See, for example, Michael Davis, *The Soul of the Greeks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 57–58.

⁷ It is worth mentioning that Aristotle introduced this discussion of the soul in Book I as especially appropriate for a statesman (*politikos*), and therefore as a useful but not an entirely precise or accurate account (1102a10–30). The indeterminate structure of the soul presented would seem to preserve a role for, and perhaps even require, politics. Because correct reason is not found within the soul, the soul lacks a commanding part and so is directed outward in such a way as to provide a place for reason to emanate from an educator, a role that might be filled by law or the statesman. *Politikē* emerges as a candidate to fill the void in the soul that remains after the psychology of Book I (1103b1–8).

the same good, much like we simply listen to the doctor's prescription in order to achieve health without knowing what the doctor knows (1143b22–30). This quandary is initially resolved by the argument that there is a difference between doing these things through ignorance and doing them knowingly, much like there is a difference between obeying the law voluntarily and doing so from compulsion. The outward manifestation and product is the same, but they are not of equal stature, for being good means not only doing good things, but also knowingly doing them for their own sake. Thus the origin of moral action greatly determines its character and praiseworthiness (1144a13–22). This is to say that one cannot analogize prudence to a *technē*—the right reason inherent in virtuous action cannot emanate externally, as it does in the arts (*technai*). Prudence is not like the medical art (cf. 1140b3–10).

Along with this perplexity in Book VI is another, which arises from the fact that the account of intellectual virtue culminates in the radical depreciation and lowering of the human things, including the human good. Aristotle closes his investigation of intellectual virtue by concluding that wisdom (*sophia*)—the knowledge of those things most honorable by nature, i.e., the eternal things that exist of necessity and are neither generated nor subject to corruption—is the highest intellectual excellence. This virtue, he argues, is not at all concerned with the good for the human being “for there are other things whose nature is much more divine than that of a human being” (1141a34–1141b2). Thus, “wisdom will not contemplate anything as a result of which a human being will be happy (since wisdom is not concerned with anything that is coming-into-being)” (1143b19–21). Since prudence is the faculty of command or authority, the second perplexity concerning prudence is that the seemingly lower part of mind rules—“it would seem strange if prudence, although inferior to wisdom, will exercise greater authority than it, for what makes or produces each thing rules and exercises authority over that thing” (1143b34–35). Since it seems right that the better thing should govern rather than what is worse, how can prudence both govern and be inferior to wisdom?⁸

Aristotle explores resolving the perplexity by turning prudence into the technical governor acting on behalf of wisdom by articulating it as the *technē* of wisdom, which as technical rule is not rule for its own sake, but for something better. Prudence issues its commands and exercises its authority

⁸ Aristotle also suggests, we should note, that the problem with prudence ruling is not only that it governs wisdom *per se*, but also that it exercises more authority (*kuriōtera*) than wisdom (1143b34). That is, it is not only that the best should not be governed *by* something inferior, but also that the better should govern *rather than* what is inferior.

for the sake of wisdom, not to it, just as the doctor does not issue commands to health, which is its end, but for the sake of health (1145a7–12). But for this resolution to work, prudence must know what wisdom is, like the doctor. It must either be wise itself, or it must be directed by wisdom. If the former is the case, prudence ought to govern since it is both wise and prudent. If the latter is the case, then wisdom must have the capacity to rule or issue commands, which would entail a prudence on the part of wisdom. Therefore, there cannot be a simple superiority of one to the other or a clear split between the two. As a result, the problem raised in Book I that the good must be both final and self-sufficient still remains. The proposed resolution turns out not to be able to explain how wisdom in fact governs prudence, why it would want to do so, or what would enable it to enforce its authority in the soul. The problem that Aristotle's analysis points to is thus that wisdom cannot remain abstracted from the lower things that it would have to govern. The necessary uselessness of a wisdom without prudence recommends it as the highest activity of the human soul, but renders it dependent inasmuch as it cannot rule.

Socrates thus makes an appearance near the end of Book VI, not as a representative of wisdom (this honor goes to Thales), but as a representative of the claim that all the virtues are *logoi*. Socrates is aware of the problem of wisdom and its relation to action in a way that the wise cannot be, a problem that lies at the heart of the human soul and its direction to the good, which must be neglected by the wise, who concern themselves solely with greater than human things. Socrates attempts to provide wholeness to the soul by collapsing virtue into knowledge. This attempt is a way of putting together thought and moral action and remedying the deficiency, not only of moral virtue but also of wisdom by reducing the former to the latter. This attempt to resolve the quandary of soul's wholeness by wisdom is thus the origin of the new beginning in Book VII, which puts Socrates's claim to the test. Book VI thus sets the stage for a new consideration of the human and the divine, the self-sufficient and the best, and ultimately a reconsideration of the human soul in light of an element of the soul that had been neglected in his previous accounts—spiritedness (*thumos*).

THE DIVINE AND SOCRATES'S CRITIQUE OF INCONTINENCE

Aside from his claim that his wisdom consisted in the awareness of what he did not know, Socrates's most famous argument is arguably his claim that no one knowingly acts contrary to what is best. The question whether

incontinence exists has occupied millennia of Western thought, with numerous books and articles still being published on the problem today. Aristotle was among the first to take up the issue explicitly, devoting a good portion of Book VII of the *Ethics* to the examination of Socrates's argument and, therewith, the phenomenon of incontinence and its manifestations. Although much scholarly attention has been paid to this part of Aristotle's writing, much of it has treated Aristotle's account of incontinence independently of the context within which he examines the problem. It is rarely noted that Aristotle raises the problem after beginning anew in Book VII, or that he raises incontinence and continence to be inquired into alongside another, often ignored, feature of Book VII—the divine and brutish. Book VII is bookended by separate accounts of the human relation to the divine, and a full understanding of continence and incontinence requires understanding why and how these new moral possibilities are related to the divine and brutish.

Introducing Aristotle's new beginning in Book VII is a more comprehensive list of "forms pertaining to character" than we have yet seen. Alongside vice are incontinence (which had been mentioned in passing) and brutishness (which is new), the other characteristics to be avoided. Each of these is a contrary of another distinct characteristic, virtue in the case of vice, and continence in the case of incontinence. The contrary of brutishness receives a less direct description:

As for the contrary of brutishness, it would be especially appropriate to speak of the virtue that is beyond us, a certain heroic and divine virtue—just as Homer has written, when Priam says about Hector that he was exceedingly good, "and did not seem to be a child of any mortal man, but of a god." As a result, if (as people assert) human beings become gods through an excess [*huperbolē*] of virtue, it is clear that something of this sort would be the characteristic opposite to brutishness. For just as a brute animal has neither vice nor virtue, so also a god does not either; rather, the characteristic belonging to a god is more honorable than virtue and that belonging to a brute is of some genus other than vice. (1145a18–27)

Aristotle's claim that there can be an excess of virtue is of course inconsistent with the position he has thus far endorsed in the *Ethics*: that virtue is a mean between excess and deficiency, and that the excessive is *essentially* contrary to reason, and thus there can never be an excess of virtue within that understanding. And how Aristotle proceeds emphasizes this tension: immediately after claiming there is a divine and heroic virtue (represented by Hector), he

denies that there is any such thing as virtue of the god.⁹ Book VII begins with a morally disorienting opening, for the introduction of the divine seems to threaten the horizon of human action or virtue.

With this divine standard in the background, Aristotle turns to what appears to be the main issue of Book VII: “what concerns incontinence, softness, and delicacy...as well as what concerns continence and steadfastness” (1145a35–36). In keeping with Aristotle’s new beginning, the examination of continence and incontinence initiates a new approach to moral phenomena. Aristotle proceeds by laying out the perplexities and opinions that arise from the phenomena and experience of incontinence. Initially, Aristotle says his intention is to resolve the most troubling questions while leaving common opinion undisturbed. After laying out the perplexities (*aporiai*) about these phenomena in chapter 2, however, Aristotle qualifies his initial promise to resolve the difficulties of continence and incontinence by concluding that only some of these perplexities ought to be resolved, promising to leave some remaining (compare 1145b2–8 with 1146b6–8). Aside from the new emphasis on the *aporiai* that his approach now institutes, and his equivocal presentation of his purpose with regard to them, there is another new feature to his manner of inquiry. Aristotle’s earlier discussions of both moral and intellectual virtue were preceded by accounts of the soul that guided his accounts of virtue (compare 1102a5–1103a10; 1139a1–17); but here Aristotle does not mention the soul let alone provide an account of the soul to guide his inquiry into continence and incontinence, as he did for the virtues. In doing so, Aristotle’s procedure suggests that any solution to the perplexing phenomenon of incontinence must in some way answer to our experience of it. At the same time—initially at least—it suppresses the importance of the soul in reaching a theoretical solution: as we will see, the soul and its parts are all but ignored in the formal analysis of incontinence that Aristotle undertakes in chapter 3.

The most important of the perplexities raised by the experience with incontinence and our opinions about it is undoubtedly the one that Socrates raises in objecting to the very existence of incontinence:

Someone might be perplexed as to how a person, though he forms a correct conviction, is incontinent. Some, then, deny that a person who has scientific knowledge can be incontinent; for it would be a terrible

⁹ The reference to Hector adds to the difficulty, for Priam’s description of him as having divine virtue comes only after he is killed by Achilles. Homer, in contrast, regularly ascribes heroic virtue to Hector before he is killed. For a detailed account of the reference to the *Iliad*, see Burger, *Aristotle’s Dialogue with Socrates*, who concludes: “Aristotle seems to have gone out of his way to furnish a particularly problematic illustration of divine virtue” (133).

thing, when science is present (as Socrates used to suppose), for something else to overpower and drag it around as if it were a slave. For Socrates used to do battle against the argument [*logos*] in its entirety, on the grounds that no such thing as incontinence exists; nobody acts contrary to what is best while supposing that he is so acting; he acts instead through ignorance. This argument [*logos*], then, is manifestly in contention with the phenomena, and one must investigate, if in fact this experience occurs through ignorance, what the character of the ignorance is. For it is manifest that before he is in the grip of passion, a person who is incontinent does not at least think [*oietai*] [that he ought to act as he then proceeds to act]. (1145b22–28)

Aristotle's presentation of this Socratic puzzle itself contains a number of puzzles. First, Aristotle attributes to Socrates a warlike defense of the authority of scientific knowledge against the *logos*, one that does not seem to accord with the puritanical rationalism that is seemingly implied in the Socratic thesis. Do the Socratic thesis and Socrates himself compel a consideration of *thumos*, and if so, why? Even more puzzling than Socrates's spirited defense of the power and authority of reason, Aristotle presents Socrates as "doing battle against the *logos*" (*emacheto pros ton logon*), which is precisely how common opinion understands the condition of the incontinent and continent, who undergo an internal struggle against reason. Indeed, the formulation is nearly identical to how Aristotle presented the condition of the incontinent and continent in his first account of the soul in Book I, whose souls were said to have something in them that "does battle with and strains against the *logos*" (*machetai kai antiteinei toi logoi*) (1102b18–19). Socrates's paradox is not only spirited, but Aristotle hints that it also resembles incontinence, the belief Socrates is attacking. Socrates's spirited defense of scientific knowledge prepares the way for the introduction of spiritedness (*thumos*) and, more specifically, incontinence with respect to *thumos* that Aristotle will take up in the later chapters of Book VII, and which had been all but ignored in the earlier parts of the *Ethics*.

The most important puzzle, however, may be the often overlooked ambiguity contained within Aristotle's presentation of Socrates's formulaic rejection of incontinence. Most commentators read Aristotle to mean that Socrates is defending the position that we cannot act contrary to what we know to be the best course of action possible for us, since we necessarily and always pursue what is best, or best for us. If this is so, knowledge is to be understood as being in service of our longing for the good. Knowledge is reduced to an instrument—to be obeyed, of course, but not for its own sake

but for the sake of that which it governs, the human being as a whole.¹⁰ On these grounds, there might be no reason for us to reason at all, for if someone else were to know what is best for us, we could simply take guidance for our lives from such an authority.¹¹ Indeed, knowledge would be entirely dethroned, as it would be irrelevant whether we achieved our good through reason or chance or necessity.

Alternatively, however, Aristotle's description of Socrates's battle against the *logos* could be read to mean that we never act contrary to knowledge because *knowledge* is what is held to be best in us—that Socrates's teaching is about the necessary and proper order and arrangement of the soul. This ambiguity concerning the meaning of the authority and power of knowledge insisted upon by Socrates has at its center a puzzling problem. Is this knowledge to be understood as an end in its own right or as a means to some further end?¹² Or, if neither is sufficient, what is it that binds the two together? Here we would seem to be reminded of the divine being that contemplates. If what such a being contemplates is its own intellect, then there might be some ground for uniting reason as both a means and an end. But if knowledge can only be present in unmoved contemplation, human action and its relation to knowledge remain unexplained. Can only ignorance explain the activity of being human?

All of this raises the possibility that when Aristotle introduces continence and incontinence alongside the godlike and brutish as those things that constitute what is “new” about his new beginning, he does so because these characteristics are related in an essential way. Indeed, Socrates's thesis in light of Aristotle opening Book VII with the possibility of human beings

¹⁰ Plato's *Protagoras*, the dialogue in which the Socratic thesis that knowledge is virtue is developed most clearly, is the same dialogue in which Socrates formulates a hedonistic doctrine—that all we do is for the sake of pleasure and avoiding pain. Hence, it would seem that, so understood, the absolute indefeasibility of knowledge is coeval with reducing knowledge to a handmaiden of the desire for pleasure (352a–362a).

¹¹ One of the other perplexities Aristotle lays out in chapter 2 (but never explicitly resolves) makes precisely this point. The Sophists put forward the thesis that foolishness combined with incontinence would be “virtue,” because the resulting action would be the right one. If the correct external action were the standard, this would hold true, as it would be utterly end-directed. Sarah Broadie points out that Aristotle never expressly addresses this perplexity, because it is the simplest one and Aristotle has already in various ways rejected this idea (Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991], 267). She does not note that Socrates's formulation raises this as a question, for the authority of reason as Socrates presents it could be reduced to its benefits for action.

¹² In Aristotle's *Politics*, the rule of reason over desire is said to be properly kingly and political, rather than despotic (*Pol.* 1254b4–6), and the principal difference between them is whether the rule is for the benefit of the ruler or the good common to ruler and ruled.

becoming a god through excessive virtue raises the following question: if the “divine and heroic virtue” that is “beyond us” is “more honorable” than mere human virtue, is the perfection of human life, and thus the virtue of a human being, possible? This question raised by Aristotle’s introduction serves as a fitting introduction to the discussion of continence and incontinence that occupies the greatest portion of Book VII, at the center of which is Aristotle’s analysis of the Socratic claim that “no one acts contrary to the best while supposing he is doing so” (1145b26).¹³ As we have seen, Socrates’s formulation reduces vice to ignorance and accordingly raises doubts about moral culpability, thereby threatening moral life as such. At the same time it transforms virtue into knowledge in a way that sets perfection as the standard for virtue. Given this standard, we must wonder whether knowingly refraining from the attempt to achieve perfection—to divinize ourselves—is even possible. This question of incontinence—whether it is possible to act contrary to what we hold to be best—is raised by this awareness that the best is better than us, of the place of the human in the whole. The moderate choice of mere human virtue would shine forth as inferior to the divine life now held out as the highest standard for the human being. Thus, if Socrates’s formula is true, we must long to be divine and must be compelled to pursue this longing, for to do otherwise would be incontinence in its truest form—knowingly doing what is contrary to what we hold to be best: divine activity.

At the end of Book VII Aristotle implicitly (and counterintuitively) raises this issue of the relation between the divine and the characteristics of continence and incontinence by coming close to the hedonist view that pleasure is the best: “The same thing is not always pleasant on account of our nature’s not being simple. ... The god always enjoys a pleasure that is one and simple, for there is an activity not only of motion but also of motionlessness, and pleasure resides more in rest than in motion. But ‘change in all things is sweet,’ as the poet has it, on account of a certain defective condition” (1154b25–28). For the god, the divine activity (contemplation) and pleasure are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate the two, and therefore the best activity simply is coeval with the best pleasure. But the divine activity as

¹³ For an account of the ways in which Aristotle presents Socrates as a puritanical intellectual in the *Ethics*, see Burger, *Aristotle’s Dialogue with Socrates*, 132–35. Burger’s reading of the *Ethics* suggests that although Aristotle is critical of Socrates’s formal (and formulaic) arguments, he engages those arguments in a way that ultimately reveals that Aristotle is aware of a deeper complexity in Socrates’s teaching. While we are sympathetic to this approach, we do not seek to answer directly whether the formal presentation of the Socratic position is actually the correct characterization of Socrates’s final understanding of incontinence. Our intention is rather to uncover Aristotle’s engagement with the argument against incontinence that he attributes to Socrates.

performed by a human being cannot be the same experience, for it cannot be simply and continuously pleasant. Divine activity for human beings would instead seem to require pleasure and pain to be overcome in some way. If this is the case, Aristotle's discussion of the divine is a proper introduction for the standard of continence, which (unlike moral virtue) promises to overcome the desire for the pleasant. The simplicity constituting the pleasure of the god is matched by the simplicity of continence, which presumes that thought alone can govern action without the aid and cooperation of desire. Whereas human virtue in the context of the awareness of the divine comes to light as incontinence, divine excellence for human beings becomes manifest as the overcoming of pleasure and pain, that is, as a version of continence. The longing for continence seems to indicate a desire to become godlike and simple, a longing to be free of desire that reveals our insufficiency.

In chapter 3, Aristotle offers an exposition of incontinence that explores the different ways incorrect action might be reconciled with our possession of knowledge. Aristotle's argument assumes an incontinent actor who possesses knowledge, and his first two attempts to reconcile incontinence and knowledge rest on a distinction between the possession of knowledge and the active contemplation of this knowledge (1146b24–1147a9). In the moment of action, for example, we can know but fail to contemplate what we know, with the result that our action is contrary to what we know is best.¹⁴ Similarly, inasmuch as practical reasoning consists in putting together the universal premises of action with the particular circumstances, it is possible that we can know the universal involved but fail to see the particular premise, in which case the action will be contrary to the scientific knowledge of the principle that is actively used.

Initially, the first explanation reconciling incontinence and knowledge seems purely formal, explaining what the experience of incontinence in the knower could be, but not how or why in the incontinent the active contemplation of what we "ought not to do" is suppressed or rendered inactive and unused in the knower. It does not, in other words, appear to be a causal account of "knowing incontinence." However, a closer look reveals that the "command" Aristotle identifies here as actively contemplated and "used" or simply possessed is negative and prohibitory because Aristotle is raising

¹⁴ That the crucial distinction Aristotle is making here is between the "use" and the "possession" of knowledge also perhaps points to the problem of the integrity of knowledge in the Socratic thesis, or the ambivalence of the rule—i.e., the usefulness—of knowledge. Since the use of anything may deprive it of dignity by denying its integrity, Aristotle raises the possibility that the suppression of knowledge in the incontinent may be due to the soul's paradoxical endeavor to honor knowledge.

the problem of the relation between contemplating and acting. In principle, we can infinitely contemplate what we must *not* do, for it requires us to *do* nothing at all, and there is no moment in the contemplation when we would by necessity have to stop contemplating it. But he does not say the same of positive action, knowing what *to do*, which may require suspending contemplation in order to act, and thus require imperfect contemplation.

If Aristotle's first two arguments give an account of what incontinence is for one who knows in this qualified way, the next two arguments give an explicit account of the cause of our knowledge going inactive. Ultimately, Aristotle concludes that the experience of incontinence is like the experience of drunkenness or madness or sleep, one in which our knowing is suppressed by the passions to such a degree that we can speak what we know without really understanding what we say.

Aristotle's explanation of incontinence in terms of the absence of knowledge in the actor appears to vindicate Socrates's position that it is a failure in knowing of some sort, or temporary lapses of knowledge we possess, that lead us to act contrary to that knowledge. Indeed, Aristotle expressly reaches agreement with Socrates, on the grounds that "it is not when scientific knowledge in the authoritative sense is present that the experience of incontinence occurs, nor is it the science that is dragged around on account of passion, but rather that which is bound up with perception" (1147b16–17).

Although Aristotle's reconciliation with the Socratic position is explicit—if we know scientifically we cannot act contrary to such knowledge—this agreement does not resolve a central issue. For while Aristotle formally agrees with Socrates that science is not dragged around like a slave, his reasons for drawing this conclusion say nothing with regard to action. Indeed, on his account the final premise of action cannot be scientific knowledge, because the final premise in action is a particular rather than universal, and is therefore "not scientifically knowable as the universal is scientifically knowable" (1147b19). Aristotle's affirmation of the Socratic position thus preserves the integrity of scientific knowledge, but does so at the expense of denying it authority over desire or passion or action. There is reason to wonder whether this explanation can satisfy what Socrates was seeking—an indefeasible knowledge to control action. A second look at Aristotle's account of the incontinent knower is therefore necessary.

PRUDENCE AND SCIENCE

Aristotle begins his analysis of incontinence in chapter 3 by asking whether anyone acts incontinently "knowingly [*eidotes*] or not, and how knowingly"

(an open-ended question that is missing the verb to which the modifier “knowingly” attaches). This typical rendering by Aristotle’s translators asks whether the *incontinent* are so knowingly or not. As we saw, however, Aristotle’s examination of the issue led to the question of what sort of knowledge, if any, is controlling over action. It is therefore appropriate that Aristotle’s characteristic way of writing allows for another possible reading: “whether anyone acts knowingly or not, and how knowingly.” Aristotle’s well-known questioning of the existence of incontinence contains a far less acknowledged questioning of continence and its existence, which presumes the control of knowledge over action.

Seeing that Aristotle does not really preserve the spirit of Socrates’s position on incontinence inasmuch as his account of incontinence ultimately does not explain the authority of knowledge, some scholars have attempted to save the view that Aristotle agrees with Socrates on significantly broader grounds. Early in his discussion of incontinence, these scholars point out, Aristotle dismissed the view that what it is in the incontinent that resists but is ultimately overcome by pleasures is prudence, because no one would say that the prudent can voluntarily do base things; thus the prudent could not undergo the experience of incontinence (1146a5–10).¹⁵ In spite of Aristotle’s resistance to the Socratic thesis, then, this admission amounts to his fundamental and ultimately unqualified agreement with Socrates, for it does seem to arrive at one formulation of the Socratic position that some kind of knowledge, or rather prudence, is virtue.¹⁶

While this reading has some weight, it also obscures what seems to be the central issue: the relationship between human action and scientific knowledge. The strangest feature of Aristotle’s examination into whether someone can be incontinent knowingly is his use of “science” (*epistēmē*) throughout the entire discussion.¹⁷ As Aristotle presented it up to this point in the *Ethics*,

¹⁵ Schaefer writes: “The view that Aristotle...adopt[s]—that prudence is incompatible with wrong action—is actually a form of the Socratic thesis [that a knower cannot act contrary to his knowledge of what is best]” (“Wisdom and Morality,” 227). See also Tessitore, *Reading Aristotle’s “Ethics,”* 57.

¹⁶ Burger also highlights the tension between prudence and scientific knowledge in Aristotle’s account (*Aristotle’s Dialogue with Socrates*, 144).

¹⁷ The primary focus of this part of our analysis is the question of the treatment of incontinence involving scientific knowledge. Aristotle, it should be noted, leaves open the possibility that incontinence could also involve deeply held opinions and not scientific knowledge (1145b30–1146a10). Although the purpose of our initial analysis is to show how Aristotle questions the relationship between science and continence, we ultimately intend to show that by questioning the possibility of human beings developing a science of action, Aristotle shows that all apparent instances of scientific continence are in fact instances of continence in accordance with opinion, just as all acts of scientific incontinence are in fact instances of incontinence with respect to opinion.

scientific knowledge—*epistēmē*—seemed irrelevant to human action. For instance, in his thematic account of science in the presentation of intellectual virtue in Book VI, Aristotle noted that “we *all suppose* that what we know scientifically does not admit of being otherwise,” for which reason it is also supposed that one can possess scientific knowledge only of things that exist by necessity, that is, of eternal things (1139b20–24). In contrast, it is on the grounds that the human things are subject to variability and contingency that Aristotle demotes the human good, and perhaps even the good itself (which varies from species to species) from being a proper object of contemplation for wisdom, the highest of the intellectual virtues and scientific knowledge of the highest things. Instead, he relegates this task to prudence, the excellence of that part of the rational soul that considers matters about which one can deliberate. It is likewise prudence that Aristotle describes as properly concerned both with the realm of action and with the action itself: “That prudence is not science is manifest: prudence concerns the ultimate particular thing...for the action to be performed is of this kind” (1142a25). There is no science of the ultimate particular, and thus there is no science of action.

It is therefore not surprising that Aristotle ends Book VI by opposing the Socratic teaching that assimilates virtue and scientific knowledge: “Socrates... used to suppose that the virtues were all reasoned accounts [*logoi*], for he supposed that all are kinds of scientific knowledge [*epistēmai*], but we hold that they are accompanied by logos” (1144b27–29).¹⁸ The Socratic position is in this light an implicit rejection of prudence, which is and must be the acknowledgment of the dependence and imperfection of *logos*; the perfection of *logos* would require the perfection of its objects—prudence would, at least as it has been presented up to this point in the *Ethics*, be dissolved entirely and there would be nothing about which anyone could deliberate. The possible assimilation of prudence into scientific knowledge is therefore essentially related to the underlying division between Aristotle and Socrates, which is whether knowledge *alone* is sufficient to perfect the human being. We are therewith led to wonder whether Aristotle does not mean for us to see Socrates’s spirited rejection of incontinence—his doing “battle against the logos” in defense of scientific knowledge—as rooted in the longing to bridge the chasm between the human things and those things “most honorable by nature” that was opened in Book VI.

¹⁸ Here Aristotle also resists Socratic reductionism by presenting prudence as dependent on the moral virtues (1144b29–33). The obvious reason the prudent cannot be incontinent is that the prudent by definition possess moderation (1140b12), and thus do not experience the base or excessive desires that belong to the continent and incontinent alike.

This deeper and more consequential disagreement that accompanies Aristotle's formal agreement with the Socratic thesis—namely, whether there is indeed a scientific knowledge of action that it presupposes—is also reflected in Aristotle's action of giving an account of incontinence. For instance, when Aristotle discusses incontinence in chapter 3, deliberation is not even mentioned, even as prudence is excellent deliberation. In its place, Aristotle presents the practical syllogism as the mode of practical reasoning, a kind of reasoning that is nowhere mentioned outside of Book VII. Nevertheless, scholars have attempted to construct theories of Aristotelian practical reasoning from the statements he makes about the syllogistic structure of reasoning about action in Book VII.¹⁹ Oddly enough, Aristotle himself discusses the practical syllogism only when describing the *failure* of reasoning, a failure that is exemplified in incontinence.²⁰ The practical syllogism is never shown to implement the rule of knowledge over action successfully, and as we shall see the syllogism is mentioned again only in Aristotle's account of another form of incontinence, spirited incontinence. Aristotle's employment of the syllogism makes the possibility of a science of action the very issue at stake in his account of incontinence. As it is presented, such knowledge cannot be successfully transformed into action. The employment of the syllogism is a reiteration of the fact that the possibility of a science of action is what is at issue in his discussion, as scientific knowledge is limited to that which consists in syllogistic demonstration.

The logical explanation provided by Aristotle of what incontinence in general is—qualified knowledge combined with qualified ignorance—will on a moment's reflection seem most strange, not because Aristotle's reason, his *logos*, is incorrect, but because it is doubtful that we experience our bad actions in this way. Does anyone not experience at one point or another a struggle in the soul with regard to what we should do, an experience that is utterly unaccounted for in Aristotle's formal arguments as to what incontinence is?²¹ If so, we must ask whether Aristotle's arguments are intended to

¹⁹ For example, see Dennis McKerlie, "The Practical Syllogism and *Akrasia*," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 21 (1991): 299–321; and Anthony Kenny, "The Practical Syllogism and Incontinence," *Phronesis* 11 (1968): 163–84.

²⁰ The practical syllogism is mentioned only in *De motu animalium*, which is about animal motion and thus not specifically human reasoning as the cause of action.

²¹ W. D. Ross rejects Aristotle's explanation of incontinence in these terms: "[Aristotle's explanation] says nothing of a moral struggle; the minor premise of the moral syllogism (and with it the conclusion 'I ought not to do this') has never been present, or it has already been suppressed by the appetite. And the account which explains how the wrong act can be done in the absence of this knowledge cannot explain how the knowledge has come to be absent. But Aristotle elsewhere shows himself alive to the

demonstrate the illusoriness of human experience, to show the great disparity between our logos and the experiences we undergo.²² At the same time, incontinence and the manner in which it exists is itself explained by the fact that there is no perfect transparency of the “ultimate particular” in which action takes place—hence no scientific knowledge of it is possible. Aristotle’s argument about what incontinence is and the manner in which it exists—the impossibility of providing a logos that accounts entirely for the experience of the particular action—at once explains incontinence, but this explanation is prudently qualified by awareness that any such account will be an imperfect and incomplete interpretation of what our action really is and how it comes about. We might call this the “human wisdom” that Socrates claimed to possess—the awareness of our ignorance.

Until the discussion of the practical syllogism in Book VII, Aristotle had presented reasoning about what to do by providing models that exemplified acting well, models that culminated in his characterization of the prudent. Indeed, when Aristotle gave his account of prudence, *the* perfection of practical reasoning, he expressly declined to speak about “prudence” at all. Instead he said that prudence can best be understood by looking at those who are said to be prudent (*phronimoi*)—the standard is made evident in particular human beings. The prudent person, not prudence in general, is the standard for acting well. Moreover, the rational thought of the prudent person is more a perceptual capacity than a syllogistic one—seeing the universal in the particular, rather than abstracting an impersonal universal principle from which one can deduce the correct action in particular circumstances. Prudence, then, consists in the refusal to disembodiment the universal from its manifestation in particular actions and particular characters. That continence and incontinence would consist in the employment of the practical syllogism is nevertheless appropriate; both must replace the perception essential to prudence with a principle, or formula, for this prudential perception is not possible without the virtuous dispositions that dispose us to take pleasure in what is good (1140b17–20), and thus the dependence of prudence on desire. Incontinence is the failed and continence the (apparently) successful severing and abstraction of principle from desire—the simplification of the soul that is held out as the highest, most divine possibility.

existence of a moral struggle, a conflict between rational wish and appetite” (W. D. Ross, *Aristotle* [Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1962], 217).

²² For an analysis of some of the issues perception poses for *akrasia*, see Jessica Moss, “Akrasia and Perceptual Illusion,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 91 (2009): 119–56.

It is often overlooked that Aristotle's analysis of incontinence does not finally say much in support of continence, even though the disproving of the existence of incontinence is premised on the unproven assumption that virtue is knowledge. Socrates's position is that no one acts contrary to what he holds to be best—that continence exists while incontinence does not. But if, as Aristotle shows, incontinence is rooted in the impossibility of having a science over what is most decisive in the action—over the ultimate thing in the action—how does continence really exist? How is knowledge actualized into action? Moreover, to the extent that the experience of incontinence in such cases is explicable as the temporary absence of knowledge possessed only in potential, what explains the experience of continence? How is it that we experience temptation, but overcome it? Aristotle's analysis in chapter 3 raises these questions, and his subsequent account seems designed to shed light on them, especially with the introduction of spiritedness, which highlights the principle of action that is missing from his presentation of continence.

CONTINENCE AND SPIRITEDNESS

That Aristotle's agreement with the Socratic position at the close of chapter 3 is not as whole as it might seem is perhaps revealed most clearly in his deeds. Socrates's thesis is that incontinence does not exist at all, but Aristotle's discussion over the next seven chapters of Book VII assumes the existence of incontinence and introduces different kinds of incontinence, the most important being incontinence in regard to spiritedness. His rational conclusion does not seem to dictate the rest of his discussion, which would not take place if Socrates were really correct—Aristotle's actions, in other words, are contrary to the *logos* of incontinence's nonexistence.

In chapters 4 and 5, Aristotle moves to distinguish unqualified incontinence from qualified continence by limiting the former to the desires for the pleasures of the body that define moderation and licentiousness (one might say he gives the qualifications for unqualified incontinence). Other forms of incontinence, on the other hand, are qualified by the fact that they involve pleasures and desires tied to noble and serious things that are choiceworthy in themselves, such as honor, victory, familial love, and spiritedness, even if excess in these things is base (1148a23, 1148b5). As these noble and serious things all seem to involve spiritedness, it is fitting that this discussion culminates in the sustained account in chapter 6 of incontinence in regard to

spiritedness (*thumos*), an expression or part of the soul that had all but been ignored up to this point in the *Ethics*.²³

Aristotle begins his account of incontinent spiritedness by showing the ways that it diverges from unqualified incontinence. His analysis thereby not only sheds light on spirited incontinence, it also further develops the qualifications or features of unqualified incontinence in a way that invites reflection on the relationship between spiritedness (*thumos*) and desire (*epithumia*). Spirited incontinence, argues Aristotle, is less shameful than unqualified incontinence, because it follows reason, at least in a way:

Spiritedness seems to listen to reason, but to hear wrong, like hasty servants, who run off before they have heard everything their master tells them, and err in carrying out the command, or as dogs bark as soon as there is a knock at the door, before examining whether it is a friend. So spiritedness, because of its heated and swift nature, hears something, and though it does not hear an order, it sets out after revenge. For reason [*logos*] and imagination [*phantasia*] indicate that a hubristic insult or a slight has been received, and spiritedness, as if it inferred from a syllogism that one ought to wage war against such a thing, immediately becomes harsh. But as for desire, if reason or sense perception merely says that something is pleasant, it sets off after enjoyment. As a result, spiritedness [*thumos*] follows reason in a way, but desire [*epithumia*] does not. Desire, then, is more shameful. For someone who lacks self-restraint when it comes to spiritedness is in a way conquered by reason, whereas the other person is conquered by desire and not by reason. (1149a26–1149b3)

Because he describes it as less shameful and as more reasonable, Aristotle is often understood to hold spirited incontinence as less bad than its unqualified counterpart.²⁴ However, his explanation of the interplay between shame and reason is more complex. Action occurs in the examples provided, not at the behest of reason itself, but on behalf of the false reasoning of spiritedness (not surprisingly the actions it produces are hardly reasonable). Its aim is unreasonable and, as a result, so too are its deeds. Spiritedness employs reason, but it does so in pursuit of an unreasonable aim it holds to be reasonable,

²³ Chapter 5 presents brutish desire as a second kind of qualified incontinence. Unlike the desire for necessary things that defines the sphere of moderation and licentiousness and unqualified incontinence, brutishness involves the desire for unnecessary and inhuman things (such as eating children).

²⁴ For example, see Carlo Natali, “NE VII.5–6: Beastliness, Irascibility, *akrasia*,” in *Aristotle’s “Nicomachean Ethics,” Book VII: Symposium Aristotelicum*, ed. Carlo Natali (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 114.

inferring its action as if from a syllogism.²⁵ Those who are led by spiritedness in this way are conquered by reason, and so think they know what they do not. Action prompted by spiritedness is therefore experienced as less shameful, for the actor cannot see the reason to feel shame; it involves thinking that one's actions are in accordance with reason when they are not.

In contrast, Aristotle claims that desire rushes off to enjoy something only after having been told by reason that it is pleasant. In this sense, desire seems to listen better to reason than does spiritedness, which hears reason incorrectly, or listens only in part. At the same time, the shame produced by action spurred by desire indicates that the action is understood as unreasonable, even if the actor correctly reasons (or knows) at the moment of acting that the action will produce pleasure. Desire may better hear reason, but unlike spiritedness, it is not conquered by it. Acting incontinently (in the formal sense) therefore involves pursuing pleasure not simply because it is perceived as reasonable to do so, but for the sake of pleasure itself. Doing so is shameful because the person knows before and after doing so that the action is not in accordance with reason. It is because reason is still active in such cases that one may experience the pleasure with shame (i.e., a guilty pleasure). Acting according to desire is not more shameful than spirited incontinence because it is less reasonable (although it may be); it is more shameful because it has a better sense of its lack of reason. Aristotle's analysis therefore suggests a deeper reason for distinguishing spirited incontinence from its unqualified counterpart: whereas unqualified incontinence involves acting against what one knows to be best, spirited incontinence does not, for it does not know what is best, even though it thinks it does.²⁶ It is experienced as unqualified continence—that is, as acting according to what one knows to be best. We are therefore led to consider the ways that the spirited incontinent person of chapter 6 is compatible with the continent being of chapter 3.²⁷

As we saw, Aristotle's account of continence and scientific knowledge in chapter 3 questioned whether any knowledge could have authority over

²⁵ Such a person could perhaps be clever, but not prudent (1144a23–37; 1145b23–25).

²⁶ The distinction between qualified and unqualified incontinence becomes increasingly complicated as the analysis proceeds. The discussion of hubris, for instance, complicates the relationship between the sphere of moderation/unqualified incontinence (food and sex) and that of qualified incontinence (compare 1149a32–34 and 1149b20–24).

²⁷ Note that Aristotle summarizes the difference between spirited and unqualified incontinence as the difference between desire and reason (not spiritedness) ruling, a distinction that more obviously defines the difference between unqualified incontinence and continence than the difference between unqualified incontinence and spirited incontinence.

human action—whether continence is possible for human beings. As part of his analysis, he presented continence as the output of a syllogistic reasoning that applies scientific knowledge to potential human action. As an example, we were told that when faced with a sweet thing, the incontinent ignore the scientific knowledge that forbids eating sweet things, and are instead led by their desire to follow in action the premise that every sweet thing is pleasant (1147a31–35). Continent human beings, in contrast, reasonably “act” (i.e., do not eat) in accordance with their perceived scientific knowledge. Much like the reasoning of the spirited incontinent of chapter 6, however, those continent beings who follow the rule never to eat sweet things must rely on incomplete knowledge to do so; since they do not taste and see for themselves, they cannot truly know which things are sweet, but instead must rely on their imagination or on the testimony of others.²⁸ More fundamentally, such beings must draw the conclusion that health or self-control is in every case better than consuming what is sweet, and so must reject both the possibility of a food (like an apple) being both sweet and conducive to health, and the possibility of eating sweet things in moderation on the proper occasions in accordance with moral virtue and prudence. These continent persons can therefore be called reasonable in the same way that Aristotle describes the spirited incontinent as reasonable: in not tasting, they follow the knowledge they think they have—they do not know that they do not know.

Aristotle’s account of spirited incontinence thus introduces a more complex account of the soul, which was all but ignored in the earlier scientific chapters of Book VII. Whereas continence could not connect its knowledge to action in chapter 3, chapter 6 shows spiritedness providing authority over action and desire.²⁹ But this solution raises a new issue: although the power of spiritedness provides the missing principle of action, it at the same time makes continence difficult to separate from spirited incontinence, for we must wonder whether it is spiritedness rather than reason that is the means by which the perceived continent obtain what they hold to be knowledge.

²⁸ The most extreme version of this position would be to not eat any food on the chance that it might be sweet.

²⁹ There may be a sense in which unqualified incontinence also involves spiritedness. In the syllogism that describes incontinent deeds, desire seems to “choose” the premise (every sweet is pleasant) over and against the command of the competing premise (don’t eat sweets). As Aristotle describes it, the chosen premise only states some “fact”: it does not issue a command. Aristotle may mean to imply that we could understand the independence of desire from reason in the example as a kind of spirited refusal to be governed and controlled by reason. This would help explain the relation of spiritedness (*thumos*) to desire (*epithumia*—literally “on top of *thumos*”). Whereas pure *thumos* is not aware of its unreasonableness, desire in which spiritedness is present is so aware.

Perhaps when faced with temptation of eating (a sign of one's dependence and decay) the continent person's spirit simply invents a syllogism that allows for the overcoming of the desire. We are led to wonder if even continence involves incontinence. For if not, how can those who perceive themselves as continent (i.e., as knowers) tell whether their experience of possessing knowledge is in fact due to genuine knowledge or to spiritedness?

Of course, since both the spirited incontinent and the truly continent consider themselves reasonable it is not clear that either would assess their judgment at all. Those who perceive themselves as continent may not even consider, let alone know, that their knowledge may be false.³⁰ At best, then, we can only describe the experience of continence; because of spiritedness, we cannot know that we are continent. It seems as though solving the rule of bodily desires requires a spirit that makes the knowing implementation of knowledge into action impossible.

Nevertheless, that spirited incontinence may be experienced as unqualified continence does not deny that true continence—that true knowledge—may be possible. To achieve this continence without incontinence, however, would require the achieving of continence in regard to both bodily desires and spiritedness.³¹ By implication, a third part of the soul, with power over both desires and spirit, would seem to be necessary.

But as Aristotle demonstrated in his account of incontinence and knowledge in chapter 3, even if such a part of the soul possessed a true knowledge that was inviolable by both desire and spirit, it could not explain or cause human action.³² Thus, what is required instead is the rule of reason or knowledge over or within a being that does not act. It is therefore fitting that Book VII culminates in such a figure, the divine god who achieves the activity of

³⁰ That many readers unquestioningly accept the claim that continence is knowledge despite the fact that Aristotle offers little proof or argument in support of its existence is not surprising. Continence offers an answer to our desire for scientific knowledge of action that has animated our concern with taking control of our lives. In other words, Aristotle's argument seems designed to invite the reader to think that he knows what he does not. Aristotle's discussion of incontinence allows us to think we found the answer (knowledge) without us noticing that the reasons for it are missing. By allowing us to believe that we understand continence, Aristotle invites us to experience continence, even when we do not truly possess it. He also, of course, invites the discovery of complications within his account. It is noteworthy that at the beginning of Book VII he promises to leave us in perplexity.

³¹ Aristotle does not speak about continence with respect to spiritedness.

³² If, as Aristotle claims, unqualified continence involves victory over desire rather than simply the successful resisting of it, then continence in regard to spiritedness would seem to involve the defeat of spiritedness. (As noted, Aristotle associates victory with spiritedness. He also suggests that the desire for victory could itself be a qualified form of incontinence at 1147b30.)

motionlessness. Such a being is rightly defined as simple, for so would such a being be, if it did not have thumos.

It is no surprise, then, that Aristotle ends Book VII by declaring that living as a god is not possible for human beings. Some commenters have called this a bitter conclusion, and perhaps rightly so, for it may pain the spirit to learn that it cannot be sufficient unto itself. On the other hand, Aristotle's pursuit of the knowledge of the good does not simply end with this observation. Rather, he turns his attention to friendship. The desire for wholeness that thumos sought to fulfill through itself is turned toward other beings.

CONCLUSION

We have attempted to shed new light both on the unity of Book VII and its place in the *Ethics* by reading Aristotle's analysis of incontinence in light of his largely ignored discussion of spiritedness, and on his account of the human being's relationship to the divine. On our reading, Aristotle's analysis of continence in Book VII, and especially his account of the Socratic thesis affirming the mastery of knowledge, exposes a desire, rooted in spiritedness, to divinize the soul and transcend the limitations of human life. Contrary to the view presented in most interpretations of Aristotle's work, his discussion of continence in Book VII is not a decline from the peaks of virtue reached in the preceding books, but is rather an analysis of the possibility of reaching an alternative and higher way of life through human reason. We have argued that such a life, at least as it is described in terms of scientific reason in Book VII, cannot finally provide a coherent answer to the question of the best life for human beings. Moreover, Aristotle's analysis uncovers the difficulty of living one's entire life according to reason simply, because of the particulars that such a life entails and the action it requires, and because of the significant obstacle spiritedness poses to self-knowledge, and so to human knowledge and the possibility of philosophy.

Needless to say, it goes beyond the scope of this paper to detail the ways in which the final three books of the *Ethics* attempt to solve the problems spiritedness poses to self-knowledge and the life of reason that Aristotle presents in Book VII. However, we do believe that there is good reason to think that the teaching of Book VII, understood as we have described, is a fitting introduction to Aristotle's discussion of the possibility of friendship in Books VIII and IX and his account of the contemplative life as the best way of life in Book X, not only because both emerge as potential solutions to the problems

made evident in Book VII, but also because the reader is meant to understand and even evaluate these solutions by way of the problems raised in Book VII. After Book VII, for instance, we are better placed to appreciate the importance of the suggestion in Book IX that having a friend who is another self would allow for self-perception (1170a27–b18), even as we consider the extent to which this solution (like the achievement of scientific knowledge) is possible for human beings, to consider how or whether it can be achieved without eviscerating the particulars of one's friends in service of a thumotic desire for wholeness. We are likewise better situated to consider the meaning of Aristotle's endorsement of living in accordance with what is most divine in us, "insofar as that is possible" (1177b34), and his exhortation that for a human being such a life is one "that accords with the intellect [*nous*],³³ if in fact this especially is a human being" (1178a8).

³³ In Book VI, Aristotle connected prudence and *nous*, because both, contrary to scientific knowledge, were concerned with the ultimate particular (1143a1–1143b15).

Reputation and Virtue: The Rhetorical Achievement of Socrates in Xenophon's *Apology*

KAZUTAKA KONDO

THE JAPAN SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF SCIENCE

kondoka@bc.edu

Abstract: Scholars have long believed that Socrates's aim in Xenophon's *Apology* is simply to commit legal suicide. In order to escape decrepitude, Socrates is alleged to have invited death upon himself by provoking the jury. However, an analysis of Xenophon's comments and Socrates's conduct before the trial shows that Socrates's primary purpose is to promote his reputation for virtue. In his official speech before the court, Socrates shifts the topic of the apology from the indictment to his various virtues, provocatively impressing his excellence upon the public. By using his peculiar rhetoric, *megalēgoria*, he skillfully forces the jury to demand capital punishment out of envy of his greatness rather than proof of his guilt.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known historical fact that Socrates was tried by the Athenian court in 399 BC and sentenced to death. Popular research on Xenophon's account of this event suggests that Socrates, certain of his own innocence, committed legal suicide by intentionally provoking the jury in order to avoid the burdens of old age.

The aim of this article is to reevaluate Socrates's behavior at the trial in Xenophon's *Apology of Socrates to the Jury* and to show that Socrates's intention was in fact to promote his public reputation by rhetorically demonstrating that he was a man of virtue. Socrates was brought into the court

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because his activity as a philosopher was believed to be harmful to the city. Socrates's unusual defense mitigated the public's hostility toward him by making the audience believe in his virtue. Through this tactic, he was aiming to preserve philosophy's position in Athens after his death. The present study aims to clarify the notion of virtue that Socrates claimed to possess. It further explains how he employed a rhetorical technique called *megalēgoria* (literally, "big talk" or boasting) to attain a good reputation for himself and for philosophy via his death sentence.

In recent scholarship on Socrates, the value of Xenophon's works has often been underestimated.¹ The root of the popular neglect of Xenophon's works is his alleged lack of comprehension for and appreciation of Socrates's philosophy. It is commonly thought that Xenophon's limited understanding—owed to the fact that he was, at most, a country gentleman—trivialized the teachings of Socrates. His Socrates is regarded as a banal moralist who merely repeats commonplace sermons.²

This view is reflected in the common interpretation of the *Apology*, according to which Xenophon's Socrates preferred death to life before the trial began, because he was anticipating the burdens of old age. Hence, he intentionally brought about capital punishment by provoking the jury.³ Here Xenophon's account seems to focus on corporeal pleasure and pain, missing the core of Socratic philosophy. John Burnet attributes this misapprehension to the shallowness of Xenophon, who could not accept the forensic failure of his teacher or understand the philosophical depth of Socrates's conduct. Burnet argues that Xenophon could not comprehend the loftiness of the Socratic

¹ Robert C. Bartlett, editor's introduction to *Xenophon: The Shorter Socratic Writings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 1–8.

² John Burnet, *Plato's Phaedo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925), xii–xxxviii; Coleman Philipson, *The Trial of Socrates* (London: Stevens, 1928), 26, 31; Anton-Hermann Chroust, *Socrates, Man and Myth: The Two Socratic Apologies of Xenophon* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1957), 1–16; W. K. C. Guthrie, *Socrates* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 14–15; Victorino Tejera, "Ideology and Literature: Xenophon's *Defense of Socrates* and *Plato's Apology*," in *New Essays on Socrates*, ed. Eugene Kelly (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 156; John M. Cooper, "Notes on Xenophon's Socrates," in *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 4–9, 22; C. D. C. Reeve, ed., *The Trials of Socrates* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2002), 177. Cf. Luis E. Navia, "A Reappraisal of Xenophon's *Apology*," in *New Essays on Socrates*, ed. Kelly, 47–48; Donald Morrison, "On Professor Vlastos' Xenophon," *Ancient Philosophy* 7 (1987): 9.

³ R. E. Allen, *Socrates and Legal Obligation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 35; Navia, "A Reappraisal of Xenophon's *Apology*," 59–62; Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, *Socrates on Trial* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 60–61; Cooper, "Notes on Xenophon's Socrates," 12.

way of life—that is, Xenophon did not understand that Socrates’s devotion to philosophy as a divine mission would never allow him to commit suicide. The preferability of death to old age and infirmity was the answer that Xenophon finally arrived at in order to explain the tragic outcome of the trial.⁴ Having made a similar point, W. K. C. Guthrie draws the harsh conclusion that Xenophon’s text “is of little or no independent value.”⁵

The present study offers two reasons against this interpretation of Xenophon’s *Apology*. First, although Xenophon seemed to admit that Socrates willingly accepted the verdict, Socrates’s primary purpose at the trial was not to commit suicide to avoid the burdens of old age but to promote his virtuous reputation. His boastful speech and attitude at the trial enabled him to achieve the paradoxical result of being sentenced to death because of his virtue. Socrates adopted an unusual rhetorical method, *megalēgoria*, in order to impress his virtue on the audience; such an impression of the virtue in accord with social custom would work as an antidote against the image of Socrates as someone who depreciated social values. The fact that the jury gave him the death sentence is evidence of their envy, and therefore evidence that they believed him to be virtuous or at least acknowledged his virtue. Second, Xenophon’s Socrates deliberately shaped his reputation by emphasizing the compatibility of his life with the common virtues of his fellow citizens. Thus, the radical independence of Socrates’s true philosophy was masked in order that he might appear to the public as a good and virtuous man. By examining the gap between how he wanted to appear and what he actually was, we will be able to see the rhetorical strategy Socrates employed in order to convince the Athenians that he was virtuous in a rather conventional sense of the term and that his philosophical activity, generally viewed as suspicious at best, was an acceptable and beneficial practice.

In line with this suggestion, some commentators have argued that there would be another desirable end in Socrates’s acquiring the death sentence. Thomas Pangle observes that Socrates’s boastful attitude was primarily directed toward his follower Hermogenes (or people like him), who was respected by the public and who simultaneously sympathized with Socrates. Hermogenes’s narrative, which is marked by a favorable view of Socrates, portrays the philosopher as possessing a high-powered but respectable mind

⁴ John Burnet, *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, and Crito* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 145–46. Cf. Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 292.

⁵ Guthrie, *Socrates*, 20.

and transmits this image to the entire city. Using this reputable defender, Socrates reconciled himself to the rest of society.⁶ In addition, based on an analysis of the story of the Delphic oracle, Paul Vander Waerdt argues that Socrates's speech aimed at defending his reputation for his own justice, "justice as benefaction." To fulfill this aim, he based his defense speech on a peculiar view of justice, intending to instruct the jury and leave a lasting legacy after his death. This attitude is necessarily provocative owing to its unconventional character.⁷

Indeed, these considerations help us see Xenophon's *Apology* in a different light. However, they do not sufficiently explicate the way in which Socrates's speech enhanced his reputation among the audience at the trial. Pangle emphasizes the function of megalēgoria in satisfying the high-minded Hermogenes and compelling him to spread a favorable image of Socrates after the trial. He does not provide a substantial analysis of the contents of Socrates's defense speech or the function of megalēgoria during the trial. Vander Waerdt focuses on the story of the oracle—a small but significant part of Socrates's speech—to suggest that Socrates was making a case for his own interpretation of justice. The present article aims to revise their views, showing that Socrates's boastful speech was primarily addressed to the public in order to foster a good and widespread reputation, not to teach his theory of justice. By changing his public image from "criminal" to "outstanding man of virtue," Socrates was able to mitigate the citizens' hostility toward philosophy and, to some degree, preserve its future in the city. Actually, some believed his claim (14).⁸ Even those who were not convinced were forced to pay attention to Socrates's virtue, and thus the focus was shifted away from Socrates's guilt and the indictment (14–15, 32). It was his rhetoric that reconciled philosophy and the city, or at least brought the issue of his virtue by diverting their attention from the indictment. The trial gave him a unique opportunity to speak directly to the public. Megalēgoria was not used in a rational attempt to persuade the public of his virtue, but rather as a tool by which he was able to emotionally impress it upon them in a limited period of time.⁹

⁶ Thomas L. Pangle, "On the *Apology of Socrates to the Jury*," in *Xenophon*, ed. Bartlett, 19, 23–32.

⁷ Paul Vander Waerdt, "Socratic Justice and Self-Sufficiency: The Story of the Delphic Oracle in Xenophon's *Apology of Socrates*," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 11 (1993): 1–48.

⁸ Parenthetical references are to Xenophon's *Apology*. I use the Oxford edition of Xenophon's text (*Xenophontis Opera Omnia*, vol. 2, ed. E. C. Marchant [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921]). All translations are my own. I also refer to Andrew Patch's translation in *Xenophon*, ed. Bartlett.

⁹ According to Plato, Socrates knew that it was impossible for him to persuade people of his innocence or to eliminate the popular prejudice against him in a short time (Plato, *Apology of Socrates*

This article will first critique the traditional view of legal suicide, following and revising the insights of Pangle and Vander Waerdt. It will take a careful look at Xenophon's statements in order to demonstrate that Socrates's purpose was to promote his reputation (section 2). It will also seek to substantiate this hypothesis by revealing Socrates's intention as indicated by his own words in his conversation with Hermogenes (section 3). Then, departing from Pangle and Vander Waerdt, it will provide an analysis of Socrates's rhetoric at the trial. The final section will examine the way in which Socrates rhetorically achieved his goal, especially by clarifying the kind of virtue he demonstrated and how he shaped his reputation (section 4).

2. THE AIM OF SOCRATES AND XENOPHON'S PROJECT

With noted exceptions, most prominent scholars have asserted that the overriding aim of Xenophon's Socrates was to attain a death sentence. However, a closer reading of Xenophon's account of the trial suggests otherwise. It would appear that Socrates's main aim was to promote his reputation as a virtuous man. He achieved this aim through the use of megalēgoria. Xenophon's description of Socrates's project in the *Apology* and a comparison between the *Apology* and the *Memorabilia* will substantiate this hypothesis.

The very beginning of the *Apology* seems to be the most important. Xenophon begins, "It seems to me to be also worthwhile to recall how Socrates, when he was summoned to the court, deliberated concerning his defense speech and the end of his life" (1). Xenophon's somewhat limited account aims to supplement the accounts of previous writers concerning a particular feature of Socrates's conduct. According to Xenophon, they all mention Socrates's use of megalēgoria but they do not clarify his purpose in using it. Therefore, Socrates's behavior appears rather imprudent, as though he foolishly provoked the jury and carelessly invited his own death sentence. However, Xenophon contends that Socrates was successful in inviting his own death since, to his mind, death was already preferable to old age. Xenophon's project in the *Apology*, then, is to demonstrate Socrates's prudence in using megalēgoria, and he accomplishes this by revealing Socrates's inner thought.

However, Xenophon does not suggest that Socrates's preference for death fully explains his use of megalēgoria.¹⁰ On the contrary, Xenophon discloses

18e5–19a7, 24a1–4, 37a5–b2).

¹⁰ Pangle, "On the *Apology*," 22–23; Vander Waerdt, "Socratic Justice and Self Sufficiency," 19–23.

that Socrates's main purpose was not to induce the death penalty. After reporting Socrates's official speech at the court, Xenophon inserts his view of Socrates's intention:

It was sufficient for me to make clear that Socrates considered it important *above all things* to appear neither impious regarding the gods nor unjust regarding human beings; he did not think that he should beg not to die, but he believed that it was time for him to die. (22–23, emphasis added)

For Xenophon, Socrates's primary aim was to foster a good reputation for virtue. Socrates deliberated about what kind of opinion people should have about him after his death. He clearly wished to achieve more than the end of his life.¹¹

Moreover, the view that Socrates wanted to demonstrate his virtue better explains his use of megalēgoria than the theory of legal suicide. For megalēgoria would not be the most efficient means for Socrates to obtain the death sentence. Even if death had been his sole purpose in order to avoid decrepitude, why did he need death to come as a punishment? He would surely have had other means available to achieve this objective. According to Pangle, that megalēgoria and Socrates's death are not as closely connected as they seem is further evidenced in the *Memorabilia*. In the last chapter of this work, Xenophon addresses almost the same subject as in the *Apology* but from a different perspective.¹² A comparison between the two texts shows that, in the latter, Xenophon does not have recourse to megalēgoria to explain Socrates's death; megalēgoria appears only in the *Apology*.

In the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon uses the reasonableness of Socrates's death to do justice to Socrates's claim about his *daimonion*. "Someone" might have thought that Socrates was lying about his *daimonion* because the *daimonion*, as Socrates's protector, was supposed to save his life by indicating the future to him, but failed to do so.¹³ However, this criticism assumes that death is to be avoided at all times. Xenophon argues against this presupposition, claiming that, for the old Socrates, death was already a good thing, and thus, the *daimonion* did not prevent him from attaining the good. Notably,

¹¹ Dorion laments that the aim of Xenophon's Socrates is commonly believed to be only legal suicide (Louis-André Dorion, "The *Daimonion* and the *Megalēgoria* of Socrates in Xenophon's *Apology*," *Apeiron* 38 [2005]: 133–35). For examples of this interpretation, see Burnet, *Plato*, 145–46; Allen, *Socrates and Legal Obligation*, 13, 35; Navia, "A Reappraisal of Xenophon's *Apology*," 56–58; Tejera, "Ideology and Literature," 153; Vlastos, *Socrates*, 291–93.

¹² *Memorabilia* 4.8.

¹³ *Memorabilia* 4.8.1

when Xenophon insists that death was preferable for Socrates, he does not describe what Socrates said at the court; he mentions only the burdens of old age. Relatedly, Pangle points out, “Xenophon can explain that Socrates had decided to accept the death penalty without making any reference to his decision to indulge in big talk.”¹⁴ Thus, Socrates’s megalēgoria cannot be explained as a necessary requirement of his professed desire to die before the onset of extreme old age. A wish to die does not require that one wish to be condemned and executed. Even if the trial had been unavoidable, megalēgoria would not have been the only means by which Socrates could choose to die legally.¹⁵

Conversely, megalēgoria features prominently in the *Apology* and is connected to virtue.¹⁶ For “virtue” is an appropriate answer to the question: of what exactly did Socrates boast at the trial? If his only aim was to provoke the jury, he would have had options other than boasting. Xenophon’s understanding of Socrates’s megalēgoria thus necessitates the description of Socrates’s demonstration of virtue: the very function of megalēgoria was to publicly promote this virtue.

In sum, the *Apology* clearly states, and an interpretation of the *Memorabilia* suggests, that Xenophon’s Socrates prioritized presenting his virtue over attaining the death sentence. Although this primary purpose is less than conspicuous, we cannot comprehend the deeper rationality behind his megalēgoria without appealing to it. In particular, we need to consider it in relation to the reason Socrates criticized the indictment and blamed the accusers and their fellows after the verdict had been reached (24–26). If Socrates intended only to die, we would not expect this behavior. Thus, his boastful behavior can be explained by his intention to demonstrate his virtue.

3. THE CONVERSATION WITH HERMOGENES

In order to provide further evidence that Socrates’s primary purpose was to demonstrate his virtue, this section will examine the conversation that took

¹⁴ Pangle, “On the *Apology*,” 21.

¹⁵ Indeed, Socrates explained that execution is a good way for an old man to die (7). However, Pangle suggests that if Socrates aimed only to die, he could have offered a weak defense or simply refused to say anything in order to bring about a conviction; he did not behave in that way (Pangle, “On the *Apology*,” 22). In addition, Socrates’s preference for death is explained in the first eight or nine sections; if he did not have another purpose, the rest of the work would be unnecessary (Pangle, “On the *Apology*,” 21; cf. Vander Waerdt, “Socratic Justice and Self Sufficiency,” 21). Execution may be a better way of dying, but megalēgoria would not be a necessary requirement for attaining it.

¹⁶ Leo Strauss, *Xenophon’s Socrates* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s, 1998), 139.

place between Socrates and Hermogenes before the trial. The argument on this point is important, because this conversation is traditionally believed to substantiate the theory of legal suicide. Let us criticize this interpretation based on Socrates's own statements.

Unlike Plato in his *Apology*, Xenophon presents one of Socrates's private conversations in order to show that his conduct at the trial matched his intentions before the trial. Xenophon illustrates Socrates's intention by employing a reporter who spoke directly with Socrates. Hermogenes gave a report about Socrates that makes it clear that Socrates's megalēgoria was both intentional and reasonable. The rest of the work, including the scene of the trial, largely consists of this report. Xenophon tends not to depict Socrates directly confronting the jury and the Athenians, but presents him through the mouth of an associate who is sympathetic to Socrates.¹⁷

At first glance, Hermogenes's report appears to substantiate the theory of legal suicide. Indeed, Socrates's conversation with Hermogenes comes right after Xenophon's opening statement that, for Socrates, death was already preferable to life (2). In addition, the desirability of death is strongly emphasized in the course of the conversation (6, 8). However, Socrates only defended death in his particular circumstances as a less undesirable option than the burdens of old age. Socrates's deeper purpose, that is, the promotion of his reputation concerning virtue, is also present. Taking a closer look at the character of Hermogenes as well as at the overall structure of the conversation, we can see why the acceptability of death becomes so prominent: Socrates emphasized the topic that is acceptable for this particular interlocutor, Hermogenes.

Before taking a closer look at the conversation, we need to delve deeper into the character of Hermogenes. Pangle observes that there was a kinship between Hermogenes and Socrates in such matters as poverty and unconventional morality.¹⁸ Hermogenes's personality, characterized by his serious morality and unique piety,¹⁹ was a reaction to the conventional system of

¹⁷ Xenophon does not affirm the historical accuracy of Hermogenes's report, even though he compares it with other sources. Cf. Cooper, "Notes on Xenophon's Socrates," 12. Hermogenes's report is only used until the verdict is reached. After this, Xenophon uses other testimonies (23ff.).

¹⁸ Hermogenes was so poor that he needed other people's help; for some reason, all of his father's fortune went to Hermogenes's elder brother Callias, who became famous for his great wealth (*Memorabilia* 2.10; Plato, *Cratylus* 391b–c; Herodotus 6.121–22; Pangle, "On the *Apology*," 25–26).

¹⁹ Hermogenes was pious, but he shared some unorthodox beliefs with Socrates. In particular, Hermogenes accepted Socrates's daimonion as a genuine divinity, even though it seemed unorthodox to some people, like Socrates's accusers (4–5). However, this does not mean that Hermogenes had any difficulty interacting with his fellow citizens. Unlike Euthyphro, he was not the sort of person

values that held wealth and the law of religion in high regard.²⁰ His longing for true gentlemanliness replaced the wealth and social status he lacked. This kinship explains Hermogenes's sympathy for Socrates. Notably, his ambivalent relationship to the common moral practices does not mean that Hermogenes had rebelled against the city. As Xenophon puts it, Hermogenes never "received blame."²¹ He was regarded as a man of "good intention." At the same time, he took Socrates's side.²² Hermogenes was therefore both a supporter of Socrates and a safe, respectable reporter of Socrates's conduct.

However, although there was a kinship between Socrates and Hermogenes, as Pangle emphasizes, this does not mean that Hermogenes shared Socrates's view in the trial. Actually, Hermogenes's concern about Socrates's strange attitude before the trial was what triggered the conversation between the two men in the first place. Upon seeing Socrates conversing about everything but the trial, Hermogenes implored him to consider what he would say in his defense speech. Socrates replied that he had lived caring for his apology. According to Socrates, doing nothing unjust is the noblest care of one's defense. Socrates seemed to believe that demonstrating his way of life would be sufficient for his purposes. In other words, he did not intend to confront the charges directly. Hermogenes was not satisfied with this answer. He knew well that the Athenian judges often executed innocent men on account of their irksome speech, just as they also acquitted guilty men on account of their piteous and pleasing speech. Hermogenes believed that Socrates should persuade the judges of his innocence in the proper and ordinary way, as a good speech was essential for acquittal. Although caring for Socrates led Hermogenes to find the common legal practice defective, his advice to Socrates did not really go beyond convention.

In order to defend his position to Hermogenes, Socrates deferred to his daimonion. He claimed that he had tried to consider his defense twice but his daimonion opposed him (4). Hermogenes, being a deeply pious man, found plausibility in Socrates's argument but he was surprised; not because Socrates received the divine sign (which showed that he was blessed) or because

who would accuse his own father in order to demonstrate his superiority as a pious man. In addition, unlike Socrates, he did not teach anything to people in order to make them similar to him. Hermogenes was modest, and his unorthodox ideas did not interfere with his social acceptance (Plato, *Euthyphro* 3b5–9).

²⁰ Pangle, "On the *Apology*," 26.

²¹ *Memorabilia* 1.2.48. Cf. Pangle, "On the *Apology*," 27.

²² *Memorabilia* 2.10.3.

Socrates piously followed this sign. Hermogenes was puzzled because the daimonion opposed Socrates's attempt to think about the defense speech (5). Being already familiar with the Socratic daimonion and having accepted its authority, he believed that being acquitted would be good for Socrates. Hence, he expected that the daimonion would protect Socrates. His surprise reveals that he assumed the goodness of both life and acquittal. By showing how he was different from Hermogenes and others who share this view,²³ Socrates was already preparing to make a persuasive case for himself.

Socrates's persuasion of Hermogenes also suggests important differences between them. Socrates's statement that death seems good to the god "too" implies that god was not Socrates's superior authority (5). For Socrates, the god merely happened to agree with him. Socrates seemed to believe that death in this particular circumstance was acceptable without having to be suggested by god. Furthermore, Socrates explicitly showed their difference by letting Hermogenes know of his decision; Socrates decided to abstain from planning his defense speech even though this almost certainly condemned him to death. Let us now consider how he defended this tactic to Hermogenes.

Socrates began building his case for death by giving an account of his life. He contended that it was pleasant for him to know that he has lived his whole life piously and justly. He asserted that, in this respect, no one has lived a better life. Socrates already had a good reputation among the people who were close to him but he knew that, as his age advanced, his sight, hearing, learning abilities, and memory would decline. He preferred death, then, because the life that had once been pleasant was becoming unworthy to live.²⁴

According to Socrates, the gods were right to prevent him from seeking the means for acquittal since old age is a cause of disease and grief, from which all kinds of hardships flow without cheerfulness. Socrates defended his failure to prepare for his speech to Hermogenes by arguing that the misery of old age should be avoided at any cost. This was an effective means of persuasion for

²³ Xenophon assumes that readers of the previous writings on the Socratic trial share this assumption, which is the basis for their inference that Socrates, having failed to save himself, was irrational (1). Hermogenes's assumption was arguably universal and, in this sense, he was representative of the common man. He even shared this assumption with an enemy of Socrates in the *Memorabilia* (4.8.1). Thus, persuading Hermogenes amounted to persuading people in general.

²⁴ Socrates's demonstration of the goodness of death was essentially a demonstration of the goodness of his life. The preference for death was conditional. When he was young, life was pleasant and good. Even now, life seemed pleasant to him. Socrates talked about the problem of old age as if it belonged to the future. It is also worth noting that for Xenophon, old age is not always disadvantageous (Gera, "Xenophon's Socrates," 38–39; *Agésilas* 11.14–15; *Education of Cyrus* 8.7.1–28).

Hermogenes since it directly countered his assumption that death is bad in itself while still giving credence to the divine authority Hermogenes trusted. Even if Socrates did not take the gods to be the final authority, a divine thing, Socrates's daimonion, appeared to support his decision.

From this, one may infer that in the conversation with Hermogenes, Socrates's only purpose was to defend death for himself. However, the context suggests otherwise. Socrates's purpose was not limited to escaping from the pain of old age—though his other purpose was, admittedly, less obvious. First, when Socrates referred to death, he was speaking not only from his own perspective but also from the point of view of others. According to Socrates, taking poison would be acceptable, since it would cause the most regret to his friends (7). He was certain that the death penalty would not damage his positive image. We have noted that, in Socrates's view, he already had a good reputation among his associates for being virtuous and living a pleasant life. By dying in this particular manner, he believed that his good reputation would persist, and perhaps even be enhanced after his death.

More importantly, Socrates ended the conversation by further qualifying his views about death. He directly indicated that inducing the death penalty was not his sole purpose. He says:

As many beautiful things as I believe to have received from gods and human beings, and the opinion which I have concerning myself, if by displaying these things I vex the judges, then I will choose to die rather than to live longer in a slavish manner by begging to gain a much worse life instead of death. (9)

This statement suggests that Socrates's priority was to demonstrate his excellence rather than merely to die. He accepted the death penalty only as an unavoidable consequence of the demonstration of virtue.²⁵ Although Pangle suggests that Socrates's attempts to make a favorable impression were directed primarily toward Hermogenes, Socrates clearly intended to display his excellence to the entire court. He was not entirely satisfied with having a good reputation among his companions (5), but felt the need to demonstrate his excellence to the general public, even if that meant annoying the jury. Therefore, contrary to appearances, the idea that Socrates sought only death in his apology should be abandoned. This last, brief indication in the conversation with Hermogenes further supports our suggestion: Socrates would

²⁵ Cf. Strauss, *Xenophon's Socrates*, 138.

promote his public reputation by demonstrating his virtuous life; as a result, he accepted the death penalty.

Why does the issue of death appear more important than the demonstration of virtue? The answer has to do with the nature of Hermogenes's question and his view of death. First, as we discussed, Socrates's defense of death was a direct answer to Hermogenes's question regarding Socrates's failure to plan his speech; that is, Socrates did not prepare his speech, because death was acceptable to him. Second, and more fundamentally, the choice of topic seemed necessary for Socrates in order to converse with Hermogenes or people like him. It appeared unreasonable to them that Socrates would allow himself to be killed by fellow citizens as a result of his boastfulness. Thus, Socrates skillfully chose the topic and means of persuasion in order to eradicate their belief that death is always bad. In other words, Socrates wanted to show them the goodness of death in order that they might accept the reasonableness of the megalēgoria that led to his death. As a result, Hermogenes was persuaded.

On the other hand, as it has been argued in this section, Socrates did not hide his main aim, that is, the demonstration of virtue by megalēgoria. However, it is not easy to see how Socrates achieved his aim, for how could a man who intentionally allowed himself to be found guilty of a capital crime establish a good reputation? In order to understand Xenophon's *Apology*, we must consider the way in which Socrates promoted his reputation by megalēgoria even while being sentenced to death.

4. THE RHETORIC AND ACHIEVEMENT OF SOCRATES'S OFFICIAL SPEECH

Hermogenes then described Socrates's speech, showing what he had accomplished at the trial. Pangle observes that Socrates's boastful speech was primarily addressed to Hermogenes, who, inspired by his companion's resoluteness, was expected to transmit to the public his favorable memory of Socrates. In contrast, let us analyze the effect of Socrates's rhetoric on the jury and the public. Hermogenes, who had been persuaded in advance that death was good for Socrates, would have rationalized Socrates's boastful speech and not been vexed by it. But the jury and the general audience were vexed by Socrates's boastful attitude (9 and 14–15), and this provocation had a peculiar effect: to impress his virtue, and to secure his good reputation. How did megalēgoria contribute to this achievement?

The interrogation of Meletus, which occupies a considerable part of the report of the trial, reveals the answer to this question. In an interrogation, a defendant typically confronts the indictment, aiming for acquittal. However, this did not happen in the case of Socrates. In the interrogation of Meletus, although Socrates initially appeared to object to the formal charges, he gradually shifted the topic to his superiority as a virtuous man. He never completed his defense. Socrates's strategy was rather to make people envious of him by provocatively emphasizing his possession of virtue and other people's lack of it.

Socrates first took issue with the impiety charge, but he did not confront the charge straightforwardly. The first part of the accusation had it that Socrates did not believe in the gods in whom the city believed. His reaction was surprise and wonder. This is not necessarily tantamount to denial.²⁶ Socrates's surprise was due to the fact that most people had seen him sacrificing at the festivals and public altars. The validity of the impiety charge was questionable, because his pious activity was known to the public. However, as Leo Strauss points out, Socrates was silent on his private sacrifices.²⁷ One may then wonder if Socrates "performed this particular kind of act of piety only when he could be seen by everybody."²⁸ In addition, a public act of piety does not establish Socrates's belief in the gods, since one can perform a sacrifice without having faith.²⁹ Socrates's defense of his belief did not effectively dispel the suspicion that Socrates did not believe in the orthodox gods of the city. His speech was already departing from a typical, straightforward apology aiming at directly refuting the charge.

In addressing the second part of the impiety charge, according to which he introduced strange daimonia, Socrates increasingly diverged from the normal objective of a defense speech. Professing that he had some kind of a personal god or daimonion, Socrates described this as a sort of sound he received, and pointed out the similarity between this and other divine sounds or voices commonly accepted to be messengers of the gods by his fellow citizens: the cry of birds, the sound of thunder, and the voice of the priestess in Delphi. In spite of this similarity, Socrates considered himself *more* pious than other people. While for others, the messengers of the gods

²⁶ Xenophon starts his own defense of Socrates with a similar expression (*Memorabilia* 1.1.1).

²⁷ Strauss, *Xenophon's Socrates*, 130. In the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon mentions Socrates's sacrifices at home (1.1.2).

²⁸ Strauss, *Xenophon's Socrates*, 130.

²⁹ Cf. Strauss, *Xenophon's Socrates*, 4–5.

were “birds, sayings, voices, and prophets,” Socrates called his messenger the daimonion, that is, something divine.³⁰ Socrates’s proof of the truthfulness of his claim was that whenever he conveyed the counsels of the god to his friends, they never turned out to be false. Socrates was not only more pious, but also more blessed than other people.

This argument was clearly not a direct answer to the impiety charge. For the formal charge was that Socrates did not believe in “the gods of the city.” In response, Socrates pointed out his similarity with “all people,” not particularly with his fellow citizens; thus, his piety seems to be the highest common denominator among Greeks or human beings in general. Instead of attempting to directly refute the charge, Socrates boasted that he was more pious and blessed than his fellow Athenians, which might be taken to imply that their view of the gods was wrong or insufficient. Hence, he failed to address the charge that he did not believe in the orthodox gods of the Athenians.

Having apparently refuted the impiety charge, Socrates shifted his locus of concern to the demonstration of his outstanding piety. Hermogenes made this clear. According to him, the judges, upon hearing Socrates’s statement, started making a great deal of noise (14). Some of them clamored because they were envious that Socrates received greater things from the gods. Others clamored because they did not believe that Socrates was more blessed than they were. Socrates had successfully shifted the issue from the questioning of his impiety to the questioning of his blessedness. This infuriated the jury, but their clamor was also evidence of their envy. Socrates, “by extolling himself at the court, [brought] envy upon himself” (32).

Socrates’s reaction to the clamor of the jury was even more provocative. According to him, when Chaerephon asked Apollo about Socrates before the many, he received the answer that no human being was more liberal, more just, and more moderate than Socrates (14).³¹ Thus, Socrates became more boastful, for he increased the number of his virtues by making use of direct divine authority. Socrates had initially set out to prove his piety, but here he enumerated three additional virtues: liberality, justice, and moderation. Socrates told the story of the oracle aiming at a specific type of person, that is, the type that did not wish to believe in Socrates’s blessedness (14). Since

³⁰ In this respect, too, Socrates differed from Hermogenes, who called the messengers “voices, dreams, and birds” (*Symposium* 4.48).

³¹ This story does not establish his belief in Apollo, the god of Delphi, for there is no mention that Socrates sent Chaerephon there. Apollo is also silent about piety as a Socratic virtue (Strauss, *Xenophon’s Socrates*, 131–32).

boastfulness was intimately connected with the demonstration of his virtue, it seemed necessary to him to be more boastful in order to make more people envious of his excellence.

Naturally, Socrates's response to the clamor of the jury caused even more clamor (15). Since the jury's reaction was against his claim to excellence, Socrates had succeeded in directing the attention of a greater number of people to his virtue, and away from the original accusation against him. Confronting the agitated jury, Socrates pretended to appease but effectively provoked them further by saying that the god of Delphi said greater things to Lycurgus than it did to him. The story has it that when Lycurgus went to the temple, the god addressed him thus: "I'm considering whether I should call you a god or a human being" (15). Socrates admitted that he could not compete with the founder of the enemy city, since the god did not compare Socrates to a deity. According to Socrates, the jury was overreacting, since Socrates was not claiming godlike status, only that he far surpassed ordinary human beings (15). In the oracle, the god did not explicitly say that Socrates was superior to other human beings, but only that no one exceeded him in the virtues mentioned (the oracle may have meant that Socrates and others are equally virtuous). However, Socrates interpreted this in the most boastful way. His provocative interpretation of the oracle forced the jury to pay attention to the issue of his excellence.

Socrates's attempt to offer evidence for his virtue took this a step further. He claimed that he was continent, because he was not enslaved to pleasures of the body; he was liberal, because he did not receive any gifts or wages from others; he was just, because he was satisfied with his present possessions and did not need the possessions of others; and he was wise, because he never ceased seeking and learning whatever good thing he could since the very time he began to understand (16). In the oracle, the god had attributed three virtues to Socrates: liberality, justice, and moderation (14). Socrates enumerated four: continence, liberality, justice, and wisdom (16). Boastful Socrates seemed to think that he was virtuous in a different and greater way than the god thought.³²

³² His deviation from the oracle indicates that wisdom could be acquired through a philosophical quest for good, indicating that Socrates's virtue came from his philosophical activity. In this way, Socrates's reputation was inextricably linked to that of philosophy and his defense amounts to a defense of philosophy. But importantly, he never emphasized the fact that he was a philosopher in the course of his speech, probably because philosophy as such was on trial. Refraining from arguing that philosophical inquiry is worth doing, Socrates rather chose a strategy that would demonstrate his customary virtue to the ordinary people. In short, he made himself appear harmless.

Based on his argument concerning the impiety charge, Socrates concluded not that his orthodox piety was effectively proved, but that he should be praised by both gods and human beings (18). Socrates began his apology by allegedly attempting a refutation of the impiety charge, but his conclusion was that he was a man of great honor, an honor that stemmed from his virtue. Instead of a defense, Socrates offered a provocative demonstration of his virtue.

Socrates moved on to argue against the corruption charge. His response had a similar logic to that of his response to the impiety charge. Here again, Socrates diverged from the official charge in order to demonstrate his virtue.

At first, Socrates and Meletus had different understandings of corruption. On one hand, Socrates asserted that the meaning of corruption was known to the ordinary man:

turning from a pious man into an impious man, from a moderate man into a hubristic man, from living a temperate life to living an extravagant life, from being a moderate drinker into a drunkard, and from being a lover of toil into a soft person, or yielding to some other base pleasure. (19)

Based on this understanding, Socrates attempted to ask Meletus about the men whom he (Socrates) had allegedly corrupted. However, without naming a particular individual, Meletus raised a different issue: Socrates persuaded the young to obey him rather than their parents (20). Meletus had a different understanding of the notion of corruption, cherishing parental authority, the traditional way of education, and, generally, the *nomos* of the city. For Meletus, Socrates was a menace to the ordinary way of citizen life.

Based on Meletus's account, Socrates skillfully established his customary virtue. He did not object to Meletus's formulation as such, but agreed with him "concerning education at least" (20). According to Socrates, it was widely accepted that one should obey experts rather than one's relatives. For example, in matters of health, people should obey doctors; in the assembly, those who speak most sensibly; and in war, generals who were elected owing to their good military sense. Socrates thus appealed to the convention of the Athenians, and Meletus agreed on this point by saying that this was "advantageous and customary" (20). It was surprising, Socrates claimed, that he—who was held to be the best concerning the greatest good for human beings, namely, education—was being prosecuted on a capital charge (21). In light of his response to the impiety charge, Socrates appeared to be a great

educator from the customary point of view of the ordinary people (21; cf. 11). Once again, Socrates was not so much concerned with refuting the charge as with demonstrating his excellence. This marks the end of the second part of the interrogation.

Socrates effectively and provocatively demonstrated his excellence, while neglecting to offer an effective defense against the charges. But it does not follow that Socratic virtue was the virtue of the common citizen, as is often supposed.³³ As indicated in the argument against the impiety charge, the peculiarity of Socratic virtue was marked by the fact that Socrates neglected to prove the orthodoxy of his piety and, in order to explain his notion of virtue, he explicated his disagreement with the gods. Socrates was more virtuous than the god claimed (14–16). Moreover, both Athenians and foreigners who were seeking to cultivate their virtue wished to associate with him over anyone else. Many of these people offered him gifts as tokens of their gratitude (17). Socratic virtue had a widespread reputation among both the Athenians and foreigners. In short, Socrates's virtue was universal, not limited to the ethics of his local citizenry.

An important peculiarity of Socrates's notion of virtue was that it did not contribute to the common good of the local city. When the city of Athens was besieged by Sparta at the end of the Peloponnesian War, Socrates faced no greater difficulties than in a time of peace and prosperity (18). His life was independent of politics. Even during intense wartime, when the Athenians were on the verge of defeat, Socrates enjoyed a pleasant life (cf. 5), for he derived his pleasure not from the marketplace as others did, but from his own soul without cost. Socrates's (private) virtues did not relate to the public affairs of Athens. Rather, they were inextricably related to the independence of an individual.³⁴ This may explain why courage was not included in the list of the Socratic virtues: it is difficult to be courageous in private. He was regarded as a virtuous man by some people and he was respected for that reason, but he failed to prove that he was as good a citizen as his fellows.

Also, the nature of the Socratic education was not without its problems. Whereas the purposes of the doctor (health), of the good speaker (the public good), and of the general (victory) are clear, the purposes of the Socratic education were not clear. What kind of education did Socrates provide to

³³ See note 2. Xenophon's Socrates may represent the whole picture of philosophical activity including its unconventional aspects, and then attempt to attract the young people who are interested in philosophy. Cf. Pangle, "On the *Apology*," 30–31.

³⁴ Pangle, "On the *Apology*," 36–37. Cf. *Apology* 3; *Memorabilia* 4.8.4.

the young? How did his education foster good citizens? As Aristophanes's *Clouds* suggests, it seems that the Socratic education of the young did not always make better citizens. That is to say, even if they became wise, their parents and the general population may still have regarded them as corrupt. Yet Socrates considered education to be the greatest good for human beings (21). Socratic virtue was not necessarily tied to the public good, and hence, one may object that the direction of his education was questionable, especially in terms of politics.³⁵

Despite the somewhat problematic nature of Socratic virtue, his rhetoric never made him *appear* guilty or depraved. To the contrary, Socrates's piety appeared to have been affirmed by the Delphic god, and he appeared to be a good educator of the young. Indeed, Socrates discreetly indicated the problematic character of his virtue, for instance through his disagreement with the god, and its extraordinary character. But he made people believe that he was *more* virtuous than the average citizen, making that claim from the horizon in common with them, such as the normal practice of piety and the popular notion of education. We can now understand why Xenophon describes Socrates's primary purpose with this modest expression: Socrates attempted to *appear neither impious nor unjust* (22). Socrates's purpose was not only to demonstrate his virtue, but also to make people believe that his excellence was compatible with the common understanding of virtue by appealing to the authority of the gods and to the common practices of the ordinary people. He never directly refuted the prejudice against philosophy nor taught the true nature of philosophy as a lofty activity which was unfamiliar to the ordinary people, but he rendered himself and his profession "customary" (cf. 20).

Socrates's megalēgoria was essential for this achievement. His boastful speech emphasized his superiority from the common people's perspective by taking the common practice of piety and education as examples. As a result, his questionable quality as a citizen was less conspicuous. The presentation of virtue was successful in diverting people's attention away from the formal charges and making them envious or angry, so much so that they convicted him and condemned him to death.

As Xenophon explains, Socrates was sentenced to death because the jury envied him (32). It makes little sense to say that they envied him for his guilt. The object of the jury's envy or anger was his excellence, made manifest

³⁵ Vander Waerdt, "Socratic Justice and Self-Sufficiency," 44–45; Pangle, "On the *Apology*," 36–37.

through his conduct at the trial. Socrates was convicted not because he was an impious criminal, but because he was envied for being greatly blessed, just, liberal, continent, and wise. Others did not believe that he was a man of virtue (14) but they voted for the capital punishment because they were provoked by his boastful claims to virtue, not because they regarded him as a criminal according to the indictment. Socrates thus made himself a virtuous man for some, and a contentious braggart for others. His rhetoric made the trial a stage for demonstrating virtue, and the verdict and solemn acceptance of death (27, 33–34) proofs for it. In this sense, his speech was successful.³⁶

The kind of reputation established by this rhetoric is indicated by Socrates's utterance after the interrogation. After the official speech before the court, Socrates declared:

It is testified to by the future and the past that I never committed injustice, nor made anyone more wicked, but that I benefited those conversing with me by teaching whatever good thing I could. (26)

Socrates believed that his project to enhance the reputation of his virtue would be successful. However, after the trial, he no longer had to limit the reach of his reputation to those who were close to him or to those seeking to be virtuous (5–7). His reputation would spread among a greater number of the people. This was not the highest praise that Socrates could acquire, since the future would not testify that his life was “very pleasant” or most virtuous (5, 7, and 17), yet he seemed to be satisfied with having a wide but shallow reputation among most people in the future (26). It is this sort of reputation that Socrates tried to establish at the trial: he was satisfied with acquiring a moderately good but widespread reputation.

5. CONCLUSION

The present investigation suggests the following two points. First, Socrates's primary goal at his trial was to ensure a good reputation for himself among the audience by portraying himself as a virtuous man. His unusual rhetorical method, megalēgoria, contributed to this goal. Socrates did not wish only to die in order to escape the burdens of the old age. Second, Xenophon's

³⁶ Moreover, the memorability of Socrates's boastful speech would provide the people with the future opportunity to regret their reckless decision and reconsider Socrates's appeal for his excellence. For, as Xenophon puts it, anger makes people “do the things which [they] necessarily [regret] later” (*On the Art of Horsemanship* 6.13). As for the psychological mechanism of anger, see also Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1382a3–19.

Socrates had a radically individualistic virtue seemingly incompatible with common moral practice. His rhetoric was extremely selective, emphasizing certain aspects of this virtue, and subtly implying that others did not share it, according to what he knew about common Athenian morality. His conduct at the trial was guided by the desire to achieve a great reputation, and to be envied by the common people. Even though he was ultimately executed, the focus of the verdict was his virtue, not his guilt.

However, Socrates's rhetorical achievement only partially reflected his true nature. Xenophon concludes his work by praising Socrates. He writes, "When I consider the wisdom and nobility of the man, I cannot help but . . . praise him" (34). Xenophon praises Socrates not for his "piety" and "justice," which Socrates demonstrated at the trial (1, 22), but because of his "wisdom" and "nobility." Piety and justice are not the qualities that elicit Xenophon's greatest applause, but they are good enough to be demonstrated in Xenophon's work (22). What Socrates achieved in court was less than his achievements during the rest of his life. But as Xenophon notes at the beginning of the *Apology*, this made Socrates's conduct at his trial more important, since he now deliberated about "his defense and the end of his life" (1). Socrates, as a philosopher, was initially presented at his trial as an impious corrupter of the young, but his speech turned him into an outstanding man of virtue. Socrates's rhetoric affected the image that people had of him, and was the reason for his death. Indeed, he was sentenced to death because he provocatively bragged about his virtue. As he predicted, displaying his opinion about his virtue, not the indictment itself, was the reason for his execution (9).

Socrates's rhetoric seems not to be a product of selfish motivation. In the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon defines Socratic justice as benefiting others.³⁷ The *Apology* presents Socrates not only demonstrating his compatibility with the common ethics, but also practicing his own justice. It is true that his rhetoric would provide him with some consolation before his execution, because it would be better for him to die with the expectation that his good reputation would be secured (7, 26). However, more than that, his rhetoric would benefit others who practiced philosophy after Socrates. Taking advantage of the audience's emotional response, Socrates was able to overcome his philosophy's negative reputation and secure its future in Athens at the expense of his own life. His peculiar rhetoric was adopted on the only occasion he could appeal to the public in his old age.

³⁷ *Memorabilia* 4.8.11.

On “The Literary Character of the *Guide for the Perplexed*”: *Aporia and Euporia*

MICHAEL MILLERMAN

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Michael.millerman@mail.utoronto.ca

Abstract: This article argues that Leo Strauss’s essay “The Literary Character of the *Guide for the Perplexed*” presents the *Guide* as a work of political philosophy and is itself such a work. Sections I–III explore the contradiction in Strauss’s essay between his insistent claim that the *Guide* is not a philosophical book and his evidence to the contrary, examine Strauss’s Aristotelian epigraph in light of that contradiction, and discuss additional passages supporting the thesis. The final section postulates the identity of political philosophy and enlightened *kalam* in Strauss’s essay.

I

Leo Strauss’s essay “The Literary Character of the *Guide for the Perplexed*” aims to discover the science to which Maimonides’s *Guide* belongs, indicate the peculiar manner in which it is written, clarify the reasons for this manner of presentation, elaborate the methods by which a reader can approach the science of the *Guide* despite its obscurity, and, finally, establish the correct relationship between the *Guide* and Maimonides’s *Mishneh Torah*. These aims ought to be considered in light of the fact that Strauss’s essay is included

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in a collection of essays, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*.¹ As Strauss indicates in the “Preface” to *Persecution*, the essays collected there, and hence also his essay on the *Guide*, all deal with “the problem of the relation between philosophy and politics.” Moreover, according to the “Introduction,” the topic of *Persecution* is “the sociology of philosophy” (7), which has but one task: to understand the danger posed to philosophy by politics (21). Before the reader even begins to consider the specific content of Strauss’s essay on the *Guide*, then, he or she already knows about it that it deals with the problematic, dangerous relationship between philosophy and politics.² How does this problem bear on the aims of Strauss’s essay?

The *Guide* is not a philosophic book. Strauss makes and emphasizes this point more than once (42–46).³ He does so based on the discovery that the subject matter of the *Guide* is “enlightened *kalam*”—the defense of the fundamental tenets of a religious code of law⁴—or the secrets of the Torah, or the explanation of the Account of the Beginning and the Account of the Chariot, or the demonstration of the identity of these two accounts with physics and metaphysics; none of these is the province of the philosopher qua philosopher (38–46).

Moreover, Strauss indicates that Maimonides excludes from the *Guide* all the parts of philosophy recognized by Maimonides himself: mathematics, physics, metaphysics, ethics, economics, “government of the city,” and “government of the great nation or nations” (43–44). Accordingly, “we are led to the conclusion that no philosophic topic of any kind is, as such, the subject matter of the *Guide*” (45).

¹ Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). Parenthetical references in text are to this work. Hillel Fradkin, “A Word Fitly Spoken,” in *Leo Strauss and Judaism: Jerusalem and Athens Critically Revisited*, ed. David Novak (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 61, mentions the importance of situating Strauss’s essay in the context of the general themes of *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, but only briefly and in passing, in the space of less than a single paragraph.

² Kenneth Seeskin tacitly rejects the idea that the dangerous relationship between philosophy and politics, i.e., the main theme of *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, necessitates Maimonides’s “deep” or intentional esotericism, as opposed to the mere “esotericism” of difficult ideas, when he writes as follows: “if persecution was a factor in his literary career, he did not show much sign of it. We must therefore ask why he needed a deeper level of [intentional] esotericism” (Seeskin, “Maimonides’ Conception of Philosophy,” in *Leo Strauss and Judaism*, ed. Novak, 102). For Seeskin, the character of the *Guide* is better understood with reference to the theme of the limits of human reason rather than that of man and the community, philosophy and law.

³ As Kenneth Green, *Leo Strauss on Maimonides: The Complete Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 50, notes parenthetically, this is “a point he curiously repeats thrice in five paragraphs.”

⁴ See section IV below for a discussion of this term.

Finally, Strauss supports his contention with quotations from Maimonides that show that Maimonides identifies philosophy almost exclusively with "the teaching as well as the methods of Aristotle...and of the Aristotelians," to which he is opposed, or of which he is "an adversary" (42). Maimonides distinguishes "the community of the adherents of the law" from "the philosophers" as mutually exclusive. "Since he himself is an adherent of the law," Strauss contends, "he cannot possibly be a philosopher, and consequently a book of his in which he explains his views concerning all important topics cannot possibly be a philosophic book" (43). These are the three main arguments Strauss adduces against the claim that the *Guide* is a philosophic book.

The *Guide* is not a philosophic book. Yet, on the basis of "the general principle underlying his entire work and nowhere contradicted by him, that knowledge of the truth is absolutely superior in dignity to any action," Strauss concludes that the *Guide* is "absolutely superior in dignity" (92), for Maimonides, to the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides's eminently political compilation, a code of law, of precepts, "addressed to the general run of men" (94). If, then, the *Guide* is not strictly speaking and exclusively a political text, nor strictly speaking and exclusively a philosophical text, Strauss gives us reason to suspect that it is a work of political philosophy, a work partaking of both the political and the philosophical, in that it presents the philosophical in the garb of, under the aegis of, and for the defense of the political.

This suggestion is met with the objection that "there is practically complete agreement among the students of Maimonides that [the *Guide*] is not devoted to political science" (44). However, the objection can be overcome on two grounds. In his examination of the arguments meant to establish the superiority of the *Mishneh Torah* to the *Guide*, Strauss rejects as "wholly immaterial" and possessing "no validity whatsoever" those arguments that "do not reflect Maimonides' own conviction, but deal exclusively with what other people thought, or think of the matter" (80). The argument from agreement among students of Maimonides concerning his teaching is precisely such an argument. Second, Strauss claims that "the secret doctrine" of the *Guide* cannot be understood without the synthesis "in a sense" of "philosophy and politics" (58). Why would an adequate understanding of the secrets of the Law or the Torah require a synthesis, so to speak, of philosophy and politics if not because the problem of the Law is a problem ultimately of political philosophy or political science?

What is more, by the end of the *Guide*, as Strauss indicates, the "true science of the Law" is identified with "wisdom," rather than with "the science

of the Torah,” the “legalistic study of the law.” Apparently, then, the last word of the *Guide* is that its subject matter is wisdom; i.e., the subject matter of philosophy as such (90–93).

Consistent with its placement in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, therefore, the *Guide* is above all concerned with the relationship between philosophy and politics, i.e., with the science that studies this relationship, political science or political philosophy, a branch of philosophy proper.⁵

The *Guide*, then, is and is not a philosophic book.⁶ But although Strauss is emphatic, more so than any previous interpreter of Maimonides, that “contradictions are the axis of the *Guide*” (74), he does not mention explicitly among the contradictions of the *Guide* that it is and is not a philosophic book. In other words, this is a contradiction that belongs as least as much to Strauss’s essay as it does to Maimonides’s *Guide*.⁷

Why does Strauss’s essay on the *Guide*, meant to elucidate the *Guide* for its modern readers and for the sake of the study of “the history of Judaism and the history of medieval philosophy” (38, 56), contradict itself on a point of such importance? Strauss discusses this problem in section 4 of his essay, “A Moral Dilemma.” The dilemma consists in this: Maimonides explicitly asks his readers not to divulge the *Guide*’s secret teaching (54–55).

⁵ Leo Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 9–55. Of course, it is not first of all concerned with “politics” in general, but with the Jewish community and Jewish law specifically—as is fitting for a work of this kind, which does not stand with both feet in philosophy, but with one in philosophy and the other in the law. Ultimately, however, its theme is the general one.

⁶ See Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 23n32, for the view that the rejection of the philosophical character of the *Guide* is at least in part exoteric, i.e., decent and respectful. As Strauss states in his essay on Halevi’s *Kuzari*, also in *Persecution* (115):

The religious indifference of the philosopher knows no limits: he does not oppose to the errors of the positive religions the religion of reason; he does not demand that a philosopher who as such no longer believes in the religion of his fathers, should reveal his religious indifference, proceeding from unbelief, by openly transgressing the laws of that religion. ... He considers it perfectly legitimate that a philosopher who as such denies Divine revelation, adheres to Islam for example, i.e., complies in deed and speech with the requirements of that religion and therefore, if an emergency arises, defends that faith which he cannot but call the true faith, not only with the sword, but with arguments, viz., dialectical arguments, as well. The philosopher certainly does not say, or imply, that a genuine philosopher would necessarily openly reject any other religion or law in favor of the rational *nomoi* composed by the philosophers or of “the religion of the philosophers,” although he does admit that under certain circumstances he might.

See also the characterization of the first chapters of the *Guide*, and presumably not only them, as “a legal justification of philosophy” (20) and the discussion of this question in the essay on Spinoza (182).

⁷ See Steven Lenzner, “A Literary Exercise in Self-Knowledge: Strauss’s Twofold Interpretation of Maimonides,” *Perspectives on Political Science* 31, no. 4 (2002): 231–32, for a discussion of other Maimonidean methods at work in Strauss’s essay.

Maimonides himself was under a legal obligation not to divulge the secret or esoteric teaching of the Torah (46–55), for which reason he had to present that teaching using contradictory speech (68–69). That is, Maimonides wrote an esoteric interpretation of an esoteric teaching. And he forbade his own interpreters from interpreting his interpretation openly.

Therefore, Strauss’s own interpretation of the *Guide* is to a certain extent esoteric—to what extent, we do not know.⁸ Yet it is not for that reason more obscure than the *Guide*: “It is merely a popular fallacy to assume that such an explanation is an esoteric work of the [third] power, or at least [thrice] as esoteric, and consequently [thrice] as difficult to understand as is the esoteric text itself.” After all, “any explanation, however esoteric, of a text is intended to be helpful for its understanding; and, provided the author is not a man of exceptional inability, the explanation is bound to be helpful” (60). Strauss says this of Maimonides’s esoteric interpretation of the esoteric teaching of the Torah; it applies equally well to Strauss’s interpretation of Maimonides.

Strauss also maintains that “if by the help of Maimonides, we understand the esoteric teaching of the Bible, we understand at the same time the esoteric teaching of the *Guide*, since Maimonides must have accepted the esoteric teaching of the law as the true teaching” (60). It would be careless in a longer analysis of Strauss’s essay to leave the latter half of that assertion uncontested; it is enough here to raise the question whether the arrow runs the other way. Do we understand the esoteric teaching of the Bible by understanding the *Guide*, as Maimonides intended us to do, according to Strauss? If so, do we also understand the esoteric teaching of the *Guide* by understanding the esoteric interpretation of that teaching, Strauss’s?

Does Strauss’s interpretation aim to present the heart of the teaching of the *Guide*? It is necessary to repeat in full a comment by Strauss we have referred to previously. After rejecting the possibility that the historians of his time possess any of the prerequisites for understanding the *Guide* mentioned by Maimonides himself, Strauss advances the argument that the

⁸ It is by now becoming commonplace that Strauss wrote esoterically on Maimonides, though Kenneth Green refers to this view, as it concerns “The Literary Character,” more as a temptation than an established fact: “Some might . . . be tempted to think that in the complex construction of this essay, Strauss is actually instructing by example, and so is attempting to imitate Maimonides, offering a hint about his own views” (*Leo Strauss on Maimonides*, 31). For an excellent account of this practice in Strauss’s introductory essay to the *Guide*, see Aryeh Tepper, *Progressive Minds, Conservative Politics: Leo Strauss’s Later Writings on Maimonides* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013). Andrew Patch, “Leo Strauss on Maimonides’ Prophetology,” *Review of Politics* 66, no. 1 (2004): 84n2, has a list of scholars who “all suggest that Strauss himself imitated Maimonides’ esotericism in some degree in his own commentaries on the *Guide*.”

Guide may perhaps be understood “by the collaboration of many, in particular of Arabists, Judaists, and students of the history of philosophy,” though Maimonides never mentioned these disciplines and “thought very slightly of history in general” (57).

In this context, Strauss makes the following statement: “in all justice it may be said that [Maimonides] did not know, and could not know history in the modern sense of the word, a discipline which, in a sense, provides the synthesis, indispensable for the adequate understanding of the secret doctrine, of philosophy and politics” (58). This synthesis, the most natural form of which is the teaching of classical political philosophy (that is why modern historical research only provides the requisite synthesis “in a sense”; the true synthesis is understood correctly only by classical political philosophy) is indispensable for the understanding of the *Guide*. It is the theme to which Strauss’s “sociology of philosophy” is dedicated (7–8, 21), the guiding theme of the essays in *Persecution*, in which volume Strauss agreed to have his essay printed.⁹

It becomes possible to say, then, that Strauss indicates that the secret doctrine of the *Guide* is a philosophic teaching—with its own perplexities, to be sure¹⁰—presented in such a way as to minimize the “danger” philosophic teachings pose to legal or political communities, as is consistent with the fact that it is addressed “to the small number of people who are,” on one hand, “able to understand by themselves” (94) and who are, on the other, under the Law or, as Strauss puts it in the introduction to *Persecution*, who live at a time when “some political or other orthodoxy [is] enforced by law or custom” (32).

Perhaps it was necessary for Strauss first to deny and then implicitly to affirm that the *Guide* is a philosophic book in order to combat the “necessarily confused notion” of what a philosopher is, which, when clarified, leads to “what seems to be the most serious implication of the question...the relation of philosophy to social or political life” (95). Only by denying that the *Guide* is a philosophic book, a claim that had been taken for granted by the scholars of Strauss’s time and before, could Strauss restore the distance needed to appreciate the difficulties involved in the problem of “the relation of philosophy to social or political life” and to adequately assume the “foremost task” of the

⁹ “In every attempt at harmonization,” Strauss once wrote, speaking of philosophy and revelation, “in every synthesis however impressive, one of the two opposed elements is sacrificed, more or less subtly but in any event surely, to the other” (quoted in Kenneth Green, *Jew and Philosopher: The Return to Maimonides in the Jewish Thought of Leo Strauss* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993], 123). This is no less true of philosophy and politics.

¹⁰ As Tepper, *Progressive Minds, Conservative Politics*, 29, indicates.

sociology of philosophy, understanding the danger posed to philosophy by politics (21, 32).

Once Strauss had established the gap that distinguishes "the small number of people who are able to understand by themselves" from "all men" or at any rate all Jews, to whom, for instance, the *Mishneh Torah* is addressed (94), he could not leave it at the statement that the *Guide* is a philosophic book, lest he remove Maimonides too far from the Jewish tradition, which depends so much on his teachings.¹¹ After all, Strauss remarks in a footnote about a chapter in the *Guide* that Shem Tob commented as follows on Maimonides's teaching in that chapter, concerning the superiority of "speculation on the 'roots'" to the *fiqh*: "many Talmudic scholars have asserted that Maimonides had not written this chapter, and that, if he did write it, it ought to be suppressed, or rather, it would deserve to be burned" (93n164). That is the risk that Maimonides, who "doubtless subordinated his own views to those of the Jewish tradition," faced, despite his infinitely careful writing, from "the general run of our scholars" (83–84) and that Strauss, too, would face, should he dare to emphasize in an irresponsible manner this aspect of the Maimonidean teaching.¹²

¹¹ Some who have followed Strauss have been similarly tactful in their treatments of both Strauss and Maimonides: compare the title and content of chapter 1 in Tepper, *Progressive Minds, Conservative Politics*; see also Kenneth Green, *Leo Strauss and the Rediscovery of Maimonides* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 27.

Others have been forthright in casting doubt on the public or political character of their teachings. For instance, Steven B. Smith concludes that Strauss regarded "orthodoxy [as] a kind of Platonic noble lie that must be preserved in order to maintain standards of decency and public civility," whereas only a kind of Spinozism or intellectualism has noetic merit: "In the final analysis Strauss's difference with Spinoza is not with what he said, but with how he said it" (Smith, *Reading Leo Strauss: Politics, Philosophy, Judaism* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006], 83). While Strauss had written that Jews ought to "relinquish" their claim on Spinoza (*ibid.*, 65–66), some dissenting Jewish students of Strauss's can respectfully bless Strauss's name and praise him like a good wine—that much and more is at stake in the question of the literary character of one's writings (David Novak, "Philosophy and the Possibility of Revelation: A Theological Response to the Challenge of Leo Strauss," in *Leo Strauss and Judaism*, 172–92). Green walks a delicate line when he writes that Strauss "perceives that Maimonides is not aiming to 'liberate' even his best readers from the life of Torah and tradition, but he is helping such readers to reconcile themselves to them, and elevates them to a place that transcends the usual conflicts by its allowing room for freedom of thought while keeping in the bounds of the law." Writing of the counsel "to be orthodox in morality and in public life, but to be as unorthodox, or even heterodox, as needed in the private realm of the mind and in the company of like-minded searchers, whose life is legitimated by the Torah itself," Green keeps the question of the noetic status of the moral more uncertain than others do (Green, *Leo Strauss on Maimonides*, 51).

¹² See Green's discussion of Strauss's famous letter to Glatzer and the latter's response, where this very issue is raised (*Leo Strauss on Maimonides*, xx–xxi).

II

“The Literary Character of the *Guide for the Perplexed*” begins with a quotation from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (38): “The later εὐπορία is a release from earlier aporias; but it is not possible for those who are unaware of the bond to release it.”¹³ According to Lenzner, this is “the only complete sentence in Greek that appears in Strauss’s works.” Despite its importance, however, neither Lenzner nor others have paid much attention to it, except to note in passing, as Lenzner does, that it serves as evidence for “Strauss’s desire to induce the reader to experience [the] perplexity [of the subject matter of the *Guide*].”¹⁴ In Aristotle’s text, “the later εὐπορία” refers to the εὐπορία that follows from having stated well the difficulties that thought must confront when faced with “a knot in the object” of its inquiry, including a statement of “both the other opinions that some have held on certain points, and any points besides these that happen to have been overlooked.”¹⁵ The passage in question begins in the same way as the first section of Strauss’s essay begins: “We must, with a view to the science which we are seeking, first recount the subjects that should be discussed.” Consistent with this Aristotelian procedure, Strauss titles the first section of his essay “The Subject Matter” and begins it with the question: “To which science or sciences does the subject matter of [the *Guide*] belong?” (38).

Why does Strauss use Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* to set the tone for his examination of the *Guide*? Is it only because of the clear procedure of the *Metaphysics* and Strauss’s acceptance of the need to proceed by examining common opinions and points that have been overlooked, which he does indeed do in his essay?

In his introduction to the English translation of the *Guide*, Strauss draws the reader’s attention to the implicit significance of one of Maimonides’s references to the Torah by indicating the broader context of the quotation, which Maimonides omits.¹⁶ In the essay on the literary character of the *Guide*, Strauss also refers to the hints that Maimonides is able to leave to his careful readers through the method of omitting something important from

¹³ Note that the epigraph also stands in stark contrast to the initial opposition Strauss sets up between Maimonides and Aristotle.

¹⁴ Lenzner, “A Literary Exercise,” 230.

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 995a24–27, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

¹⁶ Leo Strauss, “How to Begin to Study *The Guide of the Perplexed*,” in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, by Moses Maimonides, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), xxvi.

the passages he quotes, as Strauss argues Maimonides does in the case of Aristotle's teaching concerning the sense of touch (76).

Let us apply the same principle to our reading of Strauss. Can it be that *the* interpreter of esoteric texts, whose own interpretation of Maimonides is, by his own light, at least partially esoteric, begins his essay with a Greek quotation that does no more than state the unobjectionable procedural requirement of taking stock of difficulties, common opinions, and overlooked points in order to get out of the bind of thought? Did Strauss merely intend to register his agreement with Aristotle that "it is not possible to untie a knot which one does not know"?

It is hard not to recognize the similarity of the Aristotelian epigraph to Maimonides's statement, which Strauss quotes, that the *Guide* is "a key permitting one to enter places the gates to which were locked."¹⁷ The quotation adds to the Maimonidean promise the qualification that only those who know that their thought is in a bind are able to enjoy release from *aporia* or perplexity. But who are those that know they are perplexed? Strauss tells us: only those who have studied philosophy can be in the state of perplexity that the *Guide* aims to help competent readers overcome. The content of the quotation thus indicates that Strauss himself is writing not merely for contemporary historians and the like, but also and essentially for a philosophical audience, for the philosophical few, for the few "who are able to understand by themselves" and who therefore recognize, living, as they do, under an enforced orthodoxy, that they are in an *aporia* or perplexity (94).¹⁸

In addition to the content of the quotation, its source, Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, is a further indication of the philosophic subtext of Strauss's essay. Seen in this light, Strauss's essay treats much more than "the literary character" of Maimonides's teaching; it discusses more than simply the methods required to "decipher" the *Guide* (60); it is more than merely a case study in the "sociology of philosophy": it is itself an example of the kind of writing that the "sociology of philosophy" must take as its subject matter if it is to understand well the dangerous relationship between philosophy and politics (17–21).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, lvi.

¹⁸ This is another reason why it is not simply the case that in this essay Strauss aims to seduce readers into the *Guide* by making "the mysterious teaching more mysterious," abstracting entirely from the issues of the *Guide*'s addressee, as Lenzner argues ("A Literary Exercise," 227). We come to understand the importance of a specific addressee through insight into the problem in general of the classes to be addressed, which Strauss does treat in this essay, implicitly and explicitly. In this sense, the problem of the addressee is treated in abstraction, but is not omitted or overlooked, as Lenzner suggests.

But is not the sociology of philosophy concerned with the problem that lies at the intersection, as it were, of philosophy and politics, whereas metaphysics lies in the domain of pure, rather than political, philosophy? How are we to account for this discrepancy? How are we to make sense of the opening gesture toward pure philosophy (metaphysics) in a work on political philosophy?¹⁹

Strauss's Aristotle quotation in fact puts this question to rest when looked at in context. If we follow Strauss's own practice of reading, it is not enough to consider merely the quotation itself or the source from which it issues. It is necessary also to consider the context surrounding the quotation. The section of the *Metaphysics* immediately preceding the section from which Strauss quotes includes the following passage, which brings to the surface the element of habit, custom, and law evident in the discussion about Maimonides but hidden behind the epigraph in Strauss:

The effect which lectures produce on a hearer depends on his habits; for we demand the language we are accustomed to, and that which is different from this seems not in keeping but somewhat unintelligible and foreign because it is not customary. For the customary is more intelligible. The force of custom is shown by the laws, in whose case, with regard to the legendary and childish elements in them, habit has more influence than our knowledge about them.²⁰

III

I have been arguing that Strauss's essay teaches "between the lines" that the *Guide* is to be read principally as work of political philosophy.²¹ Moreover, I have said that, for Strauss, this claim had to be concealed for the same reasons that Maimonides had to write esoterically: because of the fundamental tension between philosophy and politics and the need to protect generally accepted, customary opinions, while nevertheless reaching out to "the pupils" of the race of philosophers (36).

Further evidence that Strauss teaches that Maimonides must be understood in this way if the aporias are to give way to εὐπορία comes from Strauss's argument against a certain claim in favor of the superiority of

¹⁹ Fradkin discusses one familiar solution ("A Word Fitly Spoken," 66–68). Here, I take a different approach.

²⁰ Aristotle, *Metaph.* 994b32–995a6. As far as I know, no previous discussion of Strauss's essay has noted this aspect of the epigraph, i.e., the reference to law, custom, and habit that precedes it in Aristotle.

²¹ See also comments that occur elsewhere in *Persecution* (177–82 especially).

the *Mishneh Torah* to the *Guide*. According to that claim, the *Guide* is an ascent from "Image" (the chapter heading of chapter one) to "Wisdom" (the chapter heading of the final chapter). Inasmuch as the latter chapters of the *Guide* deal with actions, i.e., "the commands and prohibitions of the Torah," actions are superior to opinions or to speculative study: wisdom consists in action (79–80). In response to that argument, Strauss notes that Maimonides teaches explicitly in the *Mishneh Torah* that "study of the Torah is superior in dignity to all other actions." Moreover, Maimonides, Strauss avers, "asserts that most of the precepts of the law are merely a means for the acquisition of moral virtue, which, in turn, is merely a means subservient to the true end, namely, speculative virtue, or the true knowledge of things divine" (89).

Not "Wisdom," Strauss continues, but "The word wisdom" is the "chapter heading" of the final chapter. Consequently, the movement from the first to the last chapter is not strictly speaking an ascent: "'The word wisdom' is not necessarily superior to 'Image,' as is shown by the fact, constantly present in Maimonides' mind, that many learned people living in a world of imaginary and imaginative ideas call their possession and use of these ideas 'wisdom' or 'speculation.'" This renders the relationship of the first to the last chapter headings ambiguous. In order to grasp correctly the *Guide's* principle of arrangement, Strauss says, it is necessary "for a little while to replace Torah by prophecy," since the Torah was given to man through a prophet (89–90).

A prophet is one who, in addition to his other excellences, "is able also to perform the highest political functions" (91). That is, he combines "theoretical and political excellence."²² This combination "is required for the understanding of the secret teaching of the prophets," i.e., for the secret teaching of the Torah (57–58). "Since the *Guide* is devoted to the interpretation of that secret teaching," Strauss remarks, "Maimonides will also have imitated, in some manner or other, the way of the prophets." Even though the prophet relates his teaching to the people through the mediation of his imagination, whereas Maimonides relates his teaching through "conscious and intentional contradictions, hidden from the vulgar, between unparabolic and unenigmatic statements" (68–69), "the fundamental similarity between the prophet, the bringer of the secret teaching, and the interpreter of the secret teaching remains unaltered by that change in the method" (91).

²² For the argument that Strauss thinks Maimonides's prophet impossible, see Patch, "Leo Strauss on Maimonides' Prophetology."

Strauss concludes this portion of his response to the argument for the superiority of actions with the assertion that “we are from the outset entitled to expect that the sequence of topics in the *Guide* would imitate the way of the prophets, which is ascent, followed by descent”; i.e., it would follow the way of the philosopher of Plato’s *Republic*, who returns to the cave of the city after having first left it, as Strauss indicates clearly by referring to the *Republic* in a footnote to Maimonides’s own views about “ascent to the highest knowledge” and “descent to the ‘people of the earth’” (90n155).

Thus, although Strauss argues exoterically that the *Guide* is not a philosophic book, esoterically he implies that the *Guide* is a work, or rather a speech or “confidential communication” (82), of philosophy par excellence. Taken together, these two characterizations allow us to see the *Guide* as a work or perhaps *the* work of political philosophy, such that “Maimonides is not only the central figure in Jewish thought, but the central figure of all human thought,” inasmuch as the themes dealt with by political philosophy are the most exalted for the human mind.²³ Strauss’s esoteric thesis is addressed to the philosophical few, i.e., to those who are both dangerous for the law and in danger from the law; his exoteric thesis is designed to respond to the problem that “both the history of Judaism and the history of medieval philosophy remain deplorably incomplete, as long as the secret teaching of Maimonides has not been brought to light” (56).

Ultimately, Strauss did not in fact bring that secret teaching to light, although he has been successful in redressing the deplorable states of affairs he lamented. And for the puppies of the race of the perfect, especially, although he does not illuminate, he does point out “well-hidden and spacious caves” (78), which shine with a light all their own.

IV

Earlier, it was noted that Strauss characterizes the *Guide* as “enlightened *kalam*,” which, to the extent that it defends a given law, is not the province of the philosopher as such. That the theme of enlightened *kalam* is of great importance for Strauss’s essay despite being mentioned explicitly only briefly can be seen by the fact that there are more references in the essay to *Guide* 1.71—where Maimonides attacks the practitioners of vulgar *kalam*, states

²³ Fradkin, “A Word Fitly Spoken,” 56.

that he shares their intention, and promises his own type of kalam—than to any other chapter of the *Guide*, except for the introduction to book 1.²⁴

We may well wonder what the relation is between enlightened kalam, on one hand, and the exoteric defense of the law by political philosophers more broadly, on the other. For Strauss, enlightened kalam, unlike the ordinary or vulgar kind, “insists on the necessity of starting from evident presuppositions, which are in accordance with the nature of things...[not] from arbitrary presuppositions, which are chosen not because they are true but because they make it easy to prove the beliefs taught by the law” (40). Strauss draws this characterization from Maimonides, who summarizes the difference between his kalam and vulgar kalam as follows: “[Practitioners of vulgar kalam] did not conform in their premises to the appearance of that which exists, but considered how being ought to be in order that it should furnish a proof for the correctness of a particular opinion, or at least should not refute it.”²⁵ By contrast, Maimonides asserts that “that which exists does not conform to the various opinions, but rather the correct opinions conform to that which exists.” He thus opposes the position that “no consideration is due to how that which exists is, for it is merely a custom...and from the point of view of the intellect...could well be different,” and that ultimately “nothing has a nature in any respect.”²⁶

In the *Enumeration of the Sciences*, to which Strauss refers in this context as crucial for understanding the *Guide* (40n9),²⁷ Alfarabi defines kalam as “a disposition by which a human being is able to defend the specific opinions and actions that the founder of the religion declares and to refute by arguments whatever opposes it.”²⁸ He distinguishes five ways of doing so. The first involves “saying that the opinions of religions and all that is posited in them are not such as to be examined by opinions, deliberation, or human intellects.” According to this approach, “religions ought to provide what our intellects are not able to perceive...but also what our intellects object to.” This way rests on the premise that divine intellect and human intellect have no

²⁴ The three most cited chapters are as follows: 43 references to the introduction to book 1, 21 references to 1.71, and 14 references to the introduction to book 3.

²⁵ Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 1:178.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 179, 182.

²⁷ In this same footnote, Strauss also refers to Plato’s *Laws* and to *Guide* 1.71.

²⁸ Alfarabi, “The Enumeration of the Sciences,” trans. Charles E. Butterworth, in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, ed. Joshua Parens and Joseph C. Macfarland (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 21.

likeness, even in “the human being who is perfect in humanity.”²⁹ It is neither Maimonides’s way nor Strauss’s.

The second way “[sets] forth everything stated explicitly by the founder of the religion in the very utterances he expressed” and compares it to “the sense-perceptible, generally accepted, and intelligible things.” Then, “when [the practitioners of this approach] find one of these things or their consequences, however remote, testifying to what is in the religion, they defend [the religion] by means of that thing.”³⁰ If they find something that cannot be reconciled with the religion, “they are then of the opinion that the thing may be defended by it being said to be true because it was reported by one for whom it is impermissible to have ever lied or erred,” the founder of the religion.³¹

When faced with positions in the religion “imagined to be repulsive” from the perspective of sense perception, generally accepted opinions, or intelligible things, the third way “[pursues] the rest of the religions and [finds] what is repulsive in them,” confronting the followers of other religions with their own inconsistencies. Recognizing that no arguments to support the fundamental notions of a religion are “sufficient to validate them completely,” a fourth approach aims to “use things that would compel [an adversary] to refrain from encounter either from shame and being outmanoeuvred or from fear of something abhorrent befalling him.” Finally, a fifth way, which may involve “falsehood, deceit, slander, or disdain,” defends the religion by trying to “make it attractive, remove suspicion from it, and ward [away adversaries] by any chance thing.”³²

Which, if any, of Farabi’s five ways of kalam most resembles enlightened kalam? Only the second approach starts from evident presuppositions: sense perception, generally accepted opinions, and intelligible things, although not all of them are “in accordance with the nature of things,” since generally accepted opinions may not be in accordance with the nature of things. Like Maimonides in the *Guide*, this approach interprets utterances in a religion so that they are consistent with what is evident in the highest sense of being intelligible. At another level it also makes concessions to what “has the most powerful testimony” behind it: generally accepted opinions not in accordance with the nature of things may be more “powerful” than intelligible things.

²⁹ Ibid., 22.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 23.

³² Ibid.

I suggest that it is most plausible for the second way among the five to be enlightened *kalam*. At its best, it aims at a hermeneutic reconciliation between the claims of a religion and the claims of the intellect. Where no such reconciliation is available, it defends the religion, for legal or political reasons, as above reason.³³

Having worked through the opposition in Strauss's essay between the philosophic and the nonphilosophic to arrive at a more "synthetic" view, that of political philosophy—philosophy tailored for the polity or legal community, but not ultimately constrained by or reducible to that community—and having narrowed in on what Strauss meant by "enlightened *kalam*" through our discussion of *Guide* 1.71 and Alfarabi, we are now ready to look more closely at the similarity between "enlightened *kalam*" and "political philosophy."

Joshua Parens writes that "the affinities between [the] true science of the law and *kalam*, as well as between the former and political philosophy, make the *Guide* one of the most difficult of all medieval texts to interpret."³⁴ He is right to speak of affinities. But we need to distinguish the terms more clearly. We must modify the set: "true science of the law, *kalam*, and political philosophy" to read: "true science of the law, vulgar *kalam*, enlightened *kalam*, political philosophy." Now, when Parens asks: "If the relation between *kalam* and philosophy is one of hostility, then how could Maimonides write a book containing elements of both?" we can say that the answer rests on the distinction between vulgar and enlightened *kalam*. The latter, as we have seen, is open to reconciling the fundamental opinions of the religion with the intelligible things, the subject matter of philosophy. Hostility only obtains where divergence reigns with no hope of hermeneutic reconciliation.³⁵ Vulgar *kalam* drops out of the set, and we are left with the true science of the law, enlightened *kalam*, and political philosophy.³⁶

³³ Ibid. This way is also closest to the approach intimated in Plato's *Laws* (887b, 890d), which Strauss cites in the same footnote in which he refers to Alfarabi (40n9).

³⁴ Joshua Parens, introduction to *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, 150.

³⁵ As Strauss writes, describing Maimonides's position, there is an "accordance [that] exists between the philosophers and the adherents of the law in every respect except as regards the question (which, however, is the decisive question) of the creation of the world" ("Literary Character," 43).

³⁶ See "Literary Character," 93, where Strauss draws the conclusion that "the true science of the law, mentioned at the beginning as the subject of the work, is identical with wisdom." This identity only comes to light as the initial distinction between "the true science of the law and the *fiqh*," Talmud, or "legalistic study of the law" (39), is replaced, or deepened, by the addition of the category "wisdom." The remaining step is to grasp that the wisdom or philosophy equivalent to the true science of the law and not to true science simply is not philosophy simply but political philosophy.

Furthermore, the true science of the law just is enlightened kalam. As Strauss writes, “Since the students of the roots [of religion, i.e., the students of the true science of the law] are identified by Maimonides with...the students of *kalam*, we shall say that the true science of the law is the *kalam*,” with the qualification, as we have seen, that it is not vulgar, but enlightened kalam.

What, then, is the relation of these two terms to political philosophy? In response to Parens’s observation that “Maimonides’ *Guide* is first and foremost a work of *kalam* [and] only in some far more complicated sense a work of political philosophy,”³⁷ we can say that the gap between kalam and political philosophy closes significantly or entirely, when we begin to talk specifically of *enlightened* kalam, for this latter strikes us as equivalent to political philosophy.

As Jeffrey Bernstein writes, Maimonides’s “‘enlightened Kalam,’ while different in kind from philosophy, is not pure dissimulation...[for the] view that the city needs both laws and legitimating authority...is, after all, a philosophic view.”³⁸ Similarly, Strauss’s political philosophy or enlightened kalam, while “different in kind from philosophy,” is also not “pure dissimulation,” since the need for law and hence the defense of law is for Strauss to be comprehended as part of philosophy.³⁹

Kalam works in the service of a divine law and is thus bound up with theology. Is it still kalam in the absence of theology? Is not this issue sufficient to distinguish kalam from political philosophy? Perhaps. But because Strauss included “The Literary Character” in a work devoted to the principal theme of the sociology of philosophy, as discussed above, and on the strength of the connections discussed so far, I believe that, in this work at least, he indicates their fundamental identity.⁴⁰

³⁷ Parens, introduction to *Medieval Political Philosophy*, 150.

³⁸ Jeffrey Bernstein, *Leo Strauss on the Borders of Judaism, Philosophy, and History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 59–60.

³⁹ I admit that there is a tension between the view that political philosophy is a part or branch of philosophy and the view that it is more than that in what Strauss says and what I have said. In response, I am most satisfied by Meier’s elegant formulation that “political philosophy is *the part* of philosophy in which *the whole* of philosophy is in question” (*Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, 103, italics in original).

⁴⁰ All the more so in his reference to Plato’s *Laws* in the key passages on kalam. See “Literary Character,” 40n9.

When Strauss writes in another context that after Heidegger we have to work particularly assiduously to find a rational basis for liberalism,⁴¹ he is proposing a project of enlightened *kalam*. That is, he calls for a defense of the law or prevailing orthodoxy (liberalism), through the procurement of a rational basis for the law, that nevertheless tacitly transcends the law, and that proceeds on the basis of "evident presuppositions...in accordance with the nature of things." Indeed, Strauss's return to classical natural right as a basis for the public defense and corrective critique of the liberal regime is, I suggest, usefully regarded as just such a project.

For Strauss, "the intention of the science of *kalam* is to defend the law, especially against the opinions of philosophers." That is also what Strauss does with liberalism vis-à-vis Heidegger (and others).⁴² Strauss's *kalam* is enlightened because, like Maimonides, he aims to have correct opinions conform to what is, rather than postulating what is on the basis of the prevailing opinion.⁴³ The law needs to be defended, since philosophers have dealt a decisive blow to its roots. In this regard, Strauss wrote about himself that "I... cannot bring myself to clinging to philosophic positions [i.e., 'all rational liberal philosophic positions'] which have been shown to be inadequate."⁴⁴ Yet the inadequacy of rational liberal philosophic positions does not imply the political rejection of liberalism; it necessitates the task of finding a rational basis for political liberalism. In short: the philosophical liberal is perplexed. Strauss is his or her guide. Enlightened *kalam* is the way. Preservation of fidelity to both law and reason is the end. Reason alone is the coping stone.

⁴¹ Leo Strauss, "Existentialism," *Interpretation* 22, no. 3 (1995): 305.

⁴² Having spoken of Heidegger, it is worth noting that he holds an important place in Lenzner's article on Strauss's essay. Encouraged by the similarity of Strauss's epigraph to that of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Lenzner surprisingly asserts that "the six sections of 'Literary Character' correspond literarily to the six sections of part 1 of *Being and Time*" ("A Literary Exercise," 233nn24, 46). I cannot expand on the theme here, but I believe that Lenzner's gesture toward Heidegger when writing of Strauss's essay is entirely appropriate.

⁴³ As is clear in the case of both Maimonides and Strauss, however, the option will always be open to interpreters to emphasize either the *kalam* or the enlightened aspects of enlightened *kalam*, i.e., the "philosophical" or the "political" in "political philosophy."

⁴⁴ Quoted in Richard Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy: On Original Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 112.

The Spirit of the Age: J. S. Mill's *Radical Manifesto*

QUENTIN TAYLOR

ROGERS STATE UNIVERSITY

QTaylor@rsu.edu

Abstract: *The Spirit of the Age*, an early work by J. S. Mill, has long figured as the Ur-text in revisionist accounts on the English philosopher's reputation as a classical liberal and proponent of the "open society." It has not, however, received the type of sustained analysis one might expect in light of its alleged importance. This article—the first of its kind—provides a close reading of *The Spirit of the Age* in the context of Mill's lifelong aspirations for radical reform under the guidance of a moral and intellectual elite. While most scholars view the work as an anomaly (or ignore it altogether), a survey of Mill's later writings and correspondence has led others to detect a broader continuity between the "authoritarian" teaching of *The Spirit of the Age* and the "libertarian" gospel of *On Liberty*. The interpretation presented here supports the revisionist view of a Mill who was deeply committed to liberty *and* control throughout his long career, and who never abandoned his utopian vision of an elite-led "reform of humanity."

John Stuart Mill's reputation as the paradigmatic nineteenth-century liberal has been under assault for half a century now. The attack began in earnest with the appearance of Maurice Cowling's *Mill and Liberalism* (1963), a polemical work that underscored the "authoritarian" and "utopian" streak beneath Mill's putative liberalism.¹ Mill scholars, shocked and indignant at Cowling's "daring assault on Mill's standing as the apostle of liberty,"² barely had time to recover before Shirley Letwin (1965), in more scholarly fashion,

¹ Maurice Cowling, *Mill and Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).

² John C. Rees, "The Reaction to Cowling on Mill," *Mill Newsletter* 1, no. 2 (1966): 9.

reiterated many of the charges leveled by Cowling.³ A decade later Gertrude Himmelfarb (1974) developed her earlier thesis of the “two Mills”—the celebrated “libertarian” Mill of *On Liberty* (1859) and “illiberal” Mill of *The Spirit of the Age* (1831).⁴ In conjunction, these charges of inconsistency, incoherence, and illiberalism presented a serious challenge to Mill’s status as a liberal icon and proponent of the “open society.” The charges were, however, largely ignored or dismissed by the Mill establishment, which preferred to debate such issues as the consistency between Mill’s commitment to liberty and his arch-value of utility.

A quarter century would pass before another major revisionist challenge—this time by a leading Mill scholar, who could not be so easily dismissed. In *John Stuart Mill on Liberty and Control* (1999), Joseph Hamburger crowned a distinguished career with a tightly reasoned, fully documented tour de force that owed little to either Cowley’s polemics or Himmelfarb’s “two Mills.” Through a close reading of his writings and correspondence, Hamburger concluded that Mill was deeply committed to liberty *and* control, not merely in his early years, but throughout his entire life. The “authoritarian” and “utopian” elements so visible in works like *The Spirit of The Age* (1831) were not quietly jettisoned during Mill’s mature period, but refined, reformulated, and even repressed. Far from *domesticating* his radical and visionary ideas—the standard interpretation—Mill *concealed* them in his private correspondence, and cryptically *betrayed* them in his public writings, including *On Liberty*, that “bible of liberal individualism.”

For Hamburger, Mill remained an elitist utopian reformer to the end, albeit a cryptic and cautious one, viewing liberty less as an *end* in itself than as a *means* to social transformation. More specifically, Mill valued unfettered free expression as a means to facilitate the transition from a society marked by moral and intellectual “anarchy” to one based on *moral consensus* and *enlightened rule* under the benign auspices of a *religion of humanity*. That even Mill’s classic *On Liberty* was part of a recondite utopian scheme was Hamburger’s most original (and provocative) finding in a work full of surprises.⁵

³ Shirley Letwin, *The Pursuit of Certainty: David Hume, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Beatrice Webb* (1965) (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1998).

⁴ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *On Liberty and Liberalism: The Case of John Stuart Mill* (San Francisco: ICI Press, 1974).

⁵ In fairness, Hamburger was anticipated, if not directly influenced, by F. L. van Holthoorn’s *The Road to Utopia: A Study of John Stuart Mill’s Social Thought* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1971), an unjustly ignored book wholly absent from the debate over Mill and liberalism. Like Hamburger, Van Holthoorn drew heavily from Mill’s public and private papers and reached many of the same conclusions. Mill not only remained a radical and utopian reformer “up to his very last days,” he retained his faith in the

John Stuart Mill on Liberty and Control was widely—and for the most part—favorably reviewed. Hamburger, who sadly died before the book was published, would have been gratified by the immediate response and heartened at having made an important contribution to rethinking Mill and the liberal tradition. He may have been disappointed, however, in what followed. His portrait of a Mill passionately committed to liberty *and* control has failed to displace the solid, if somewhat eccentric, Victorian liberal. Recent studies either ignore Hamburger (and the “early” Mill) altogether or reject his revisionist reading outright.⁶ Among authors of full-length works on Mill only Linda Raeder acknowledges her debt to Hamburger.⁷ Not surprisingly the conventional scholarly image of Mill continues to inform more popular views of the philosopher. In his review of Richard Reeves’s *Victorian Firebrand* (2007), a writer for *The New Yorker* blithely observed that “certainly no one has been so right about so many things so much of the time as John Stuart Mill.”⁸ The reviewer shows no awareness of Mill’s complex and contested legacy.⁹

authority of a moral-intellectual elite (127). In this enduring vision, Van Holthoorn locates the “link between Mill’s ideas of the Spiritual Power as expressed in ‘The Spirit of the Age’ and Mill’s defense of freedom of inquiry in *On Liberty*” (128). The stark contrast between the two works—an obvious fact to most—is actually more apparent than real—in fact “superficial.” “There is no evidence...that Mill lost his faith in an ultimate consensus in the meantime” (115). On the contrary, there was “no fundamental change between 1831 and 1859 in Mill’s conception of the elite as a Spiritual Power” (117). What *did* change was “the presentation of his arguments for a Spiritual Power,” a shift in strategy due to changed circumstances and the readjustment of Mill’s social barometer. By 1859 the hoped-for cognoscenti was nowhere in sight, and with the rise of democracy Mill “began to put more stress on the critical [as opposed to the authoritative] function of the elite.” Accordingly, the much-vaunted “insistence of *On Liberty* on independent thinking and the need for questioning all opinions” was not a celebration of critical thinking per se, but signaled a *retreat*—“a measure of Mill’s disillusionment”—albeit a *strategic* one, for “Mill expected that discussion would lead to the accumulation of truth” and the emergence of a future consensus (122). This anticipates Hamburger to a remarkable degree, whose esoteric reading of *On Liberty* echoes through the path cut by the forgotten author of *The Road to Utopia*.

⁶ David O. Brink, *Mill’s Progressive Principles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) and Bruce L. Kinzer, *J. S. Mill Revisited* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) make no mention of Hamburger or *The Spirit of the Age*, while Frederick Rosen curtly “reject[s] Hamburger’s belief...that Mill’s method [in *On Liberty*]...was meant to disguise, conceal, equivocate, and mislead” (Rosen, *Mill* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013], 22). Dale Miller, who glosses over *The Spirit of the Age*, declares Hamburger’s attempt “to reveal Mill as an anti-liberal” a failed cause. “This is not the first time that such an unmasking had been attempted, but the project is hopeless” (Miller, *J. S. Mill: Moral, Social and Political Thought* [Malden, MA: Polity, 2010], 180). As illustrated below, this dismissive attitude is not without its ironies.

⁷ Linda Raeder, *John Stuart Mill and the Religion of Humanity* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002).

⁸ Adam Gopnik, “Right Again: The Passions of John Stuart Mill,” *The New Yorker*, Oct. 6, 2008.

⁹ This persistence of the popular image of Mill as a secular saint and champion of liberal democracy is not restricted to journalists. Philosopher Richard Rorty, who was certainly aware of Mill’s contested

While Hamburger's revisionist account represents something of a "paradigm shift," it is likely to remain a minority report for the foreseeable future.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the portrait of a Mill who strategically muted his message, deliberately shaded his meaning, and cleverly concealed his higher aims presents a compelling invitation to re-examine England's foremost "apostle of liberty." Here I wish to explore a pivotal work in Mill's oeuvre central to "revisionist" accounts of his social thought, but never subject to sustained analysis—*The Spirit of the Age*.

Students of Mill (1806–1873) have typically framed his life and work on the basis of his famed *Autobiography*. From 1822 to 1830 young Mill was absorbed in reformist political activity—debating, discussing, and writing for the popular press. Upon his return from France, where he had documented for English readers political developments in the wake of the "Bourgeois Revolution," Mill began to write his first essays on more general social and political themes. This shift was largely a result of his encounter with the writings of the Saint-Simonians, a small but influential sect of French reformers who embraced a sweeping, evolutionary vision of the future society. Mill had always been an "advanced" radical, but as a direct disciple of Bentham he grounded his reformist agenda in a theory of *human nature* as opposed to a pattern of *historical development*. This would all change through his immersion in the world of the Saint-Simonians, who elaborated a historicist, progressive, and perfectionist view of social arrangements.

Mill was particularly struck by the sect's division of history into "organic" and "critical" periods, the former marked by a general consensus of values among elites, the latter by a conflict of ideas in regard to "the needs of humanity."¹¹ Mill singled out the *Système de politique positive*, an early work by Auguste Comte (then a disciple of Saint-Simon), who viewed human evo-

legacy, nonetheless identified his "most sacred texts" (*On Liberty* and *Utilitarianism*) as the epitome of contemporary humanist and democratic aspirations. Quoted in Ronald Beiner, "John Stuart Mill's Project to Turn Atheism into a Religion," in *Civil Religion: A Dialogue in the History of Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 259, 265n.

¹⁰ Hamburger's *John Stuart Mill on Liberty and Control* bears comparison with Leonard W. Levy's *Jefferson and Civil Liberties: The Darker Side* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963). Both works challenged a liberal icon, and both have shared a similar fate. The revisionist focus on the "darker side" of Mill has been placed in the larger context of the "darker side" of liberalism, viz., its scientism, elitism, and preoccupation with control. As the prototypical "liberal intellectual," Mill—who valued liberty and equality, but also insisted on moral and intellectual authority—uniquely embodies "the main dilemma of liberalism, in all its modern varieties" (Robert Hollinger, *The Dark Side of Liberalism: Elitism vs. Democracy* [Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996], 3).

¹¹ J. S. Mill, *Autobiography*, in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (hereafter CW), vol. 1, ed. John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 171.

lution in terms of *theological*, *metaphysical*, and *positive* (or *scientific*) stages of development. If the theory of “organic” and “critical” ages reinforced Mill’s radicalism, Comte’s theory of progressive historical stages re-edified his faith in the future, and endowed his sentiments with “a scientific shape.”¹²

While Mill’s encounter with contemporary French social thought largely accounts for his shift from practical politics to social theory, this move was reinforced by his disenchantment with Benthamism, disappointment with the French Revolution, and frustration with the pace of reform in Britain. Whatever the ultimate causes, Mill embarked on a series of articles for the *Examiner* in January 1831, a radical weekly for which he had previously written. Looking back a quarter century after its appearance, Mill expressed a low opinion of *The Spirit of the Age*, which he characterized as “lumbering in style” and “ill timed.”¹³ It is notable, however, that he does not fault the work for its analysis or findings, a point I will return to below.

Mill’s decision not to reissue *The Spirit of the Age* (as he did a number of other works) has been widely viewed as a rejection of its teaching. His first biographer, friend and protégé Alexander Bain, merely listed it among those works produced by Mill between 1830 and 1840. In a footnote, Bain observes that the essays “all point in the direction of his *Representative Government*, in so far as they contain anything constructive.”¹⁴ On its face this would appear an odd remark given the striking differences between the two works and the three decades that separated them. *Representative Government* (1861), a lengthy treatise belonging to Mill’s “mature” period, contains a detailed account of “real” and “ideal” forms of government, while the brief *Spirit of the Age* says almost nothing about political institutions or governmental reform. Yet Bain appears to detect the essence of each work in a common thread: *the authority of the expert*.

Sixty years later F. A. Hayek recovered the forgotten essays and published them in a single volume for the first time. His introduction provides the biographical and intellectual context of *The Spirit of the Age* but little else. For Hayek the work’s value is essentially derivative—the “light it throws on one of the most interesting phases in the development of a great figure of the past

¹² *Ibid.*, 173.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁴ Alexander Bain, *John Stuart Mill: A Criticism with Personal Reflections* (1882) (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1969), 40.

century.”¹⁵ Had he bothered to follow this light he may have discovered an early traveler on “the road to serfdom,” whose “fatal conceit” and “abuse of reason” prefigured the experiments in social engineering of the twentieth century. It would be left to Mill’s first modern biographer, Michael Packe, to make the chilling discovery. In *The Life of John Stuart Mill*, Packe identified the author of *The Spirit of the Age* as a zealous convert to Saint-Simonism, who foresaw in England “an enlightened despotism by a scientific *corps d’elite* who... would inaugurate plenty, peace, and the religion of humanity.”¹⁶ In Mill’s intellectual elitism, Packe found a betrayal of Liberalism—the young reformer “became a revolutionary.” “There will be,” Mill prophesied, “a moral and social revolution, which shall, indeed, take away no men’s lives and property, but which shall leave no man a fraction of unearned distinction or unearned importance.”¹⁷

The question of how “a moral and social revolution” in aristocratic England would leave “men’s lives and property” untouched, or what form of rule could “leave no man a fraction of unearned distinction or unearned importance,” must be deferred for the moment. The present concern is to consider the *radical, revolutionary, and illiberal* nature of Mill’s remarks. An embarrassed Packe called the entire effort “laborious nonsense, of which Mill was later much ashamed.”¹⁸ Biographer John Ellery was equally astonished by such passages in *The Spirit of the Age* and no less damning than Packe: “Mill’s plea for social revolution as the ultimate solution to class struggle has the appearance of Communist doctrine and was essentially Utopian nonsense.”¹⁹ Ellery repeats Packe’s charge that “Mill was later to feel very much ashamed of it,” yet the assertion is unsubstantiated: there is no direct evidence that Mill ever retracted a word of it.

Today’s reader is tempted to attribute the harsh judgments of Packe and Ellery to the overheated rhetoric of Cold War–era scholarship. John Robson, erstwhile dean of Mill studies and general editor of the *Collected Works*, assigned Mill’s emphasis on intellectual leadership to youthful exuberance (Mill was but twenty-five and a rebel to Benthamism) and to the heated political environment between the French Revolution (1830) and the English Reform Bill (1832). He also places Mill’s remarks in the context of the

¹⁵ F. A. Hayek, introduction to *The Spirit of the Age*, by J. S. Mill (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), xxxiii.

¹⁶ Michael St. John Packe, *The Life of John Stuart Mill* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), 98.

¹⁷ J. S. Mill, *The Spirit of the Age*, in *CW*, vol. 22, ed. Ann P. Robson and John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 245. Hereafter citations (essay number followed by page number) appear in the main text.

¹⁸ Packe, *John Stuart Mill*, 98.

¹⁹ John B. Ellery, *John Stuart Mill* (New York: Twayne, 1964), 38.

“critical” (or “transitional”) state of society Mill hoped to overcome through the leadership of a radical intellectual elite. Robson claims Mill retained an emphasis on expert judgment in his later thought but discarded its more illiberal aspects. Moreover, he suggests that authors such as Packe and Ellery had taken passages from *The Spirit of the Age* “out of context” and “used [them] to prove much more than they can.”²⁰ Just what they had tried “to prove” Robson does not say.

In spite of such objections, the notion of “two Mills” had by the early 1970s secured a hearing in the academy. Allan Megill observed that Mill’s status as a “paradigmatic liberal” had been successfully challenged (at least as far as his early thought was concerned) and identified *The Spirit of the Age* as “the clearest expression of [Mill’s ‘authoritarian’] doctrine.”²¹ Gertrude Himmelfarb, who had reprinted *The Spirit of the Age* in 1963, would juxtapose it with *On Liberty* in her subsequent full-length study. For Himmelfarb, Mill’s decision not to reissue the earlier work was predictable, for it could never be “brought . . . into conformity with the central thesis” of the latter.²² Starting from the same premise—“a democratic society, if not a democratic government”—both essays identified the “overweening influence of public opinion” as “the gravest evil” of contemporary society. In essence, the two works are logically inverted: “starting from the same point, [they] arrived at quite different conclusions.”²³ Even C. L. Ten, a noted defender of the liberal Mill, acknowledged that *The Spirit of the Age*, while an anomaly among his works, could be read as an illiberal tract.²⁴ Similarly, Iain Hampsher-Monk has called it “the classic expression of Mill’s brief apostasy from defending freedom of expression.”²⁵

Whereas most observers view the relationship between *The Spirit of the Age* and *On Liberty* in terms of “antagonism” others have stressed their broader continuity. Alan Ryan, a leading Mill scholar, acknowledges some surface “tension” between the two works, but finds little “difference of

²⁰ John M. Robson, *The Improvement of Mankind: The Social and Political Thought of John Stuart Mill* (Toronto: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), 100, 77.

²¹ Allan D. Megill, “J. S. Mill’s Religion of Humanity and the Second Justification for the Writing of *On Liberty*,” *Journal of Politics* 34, no. 2 (1972): 612.

²² Himmelfarb, *Liberty and Liberalism*, 36.

²³ *Ibid.*, 36–37.

²⁴ This admission aside, “the Mill of this period differed radically from the Mill of *On Liberty*” (C. L. Ten, *Mill on Liberty* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1980], 170).

²⁵ Ian Hampsher-Monk, *A History of Modern Political Thought: Major Political Thinkers from Hobbes to Marx* (London: Blackwell, 1992), 347n.

substance.”²⁶ Admittedly, the earlier work has a Janus-faced quality, at once “conservative” and “radical” in its teaching: “The essay is conservative to the degree that it laments the absence of authority—intellectual, religious, political—but radical to the extent it uses the exemplars of *true* authority beloved of conservatives to mock the claims of contemporary intellectuals, aristocracy, and clergy to such authority.” Elsewhere Ryan suggests that Mill retained his belief in intellectual authority and a future consensus, but extended his timetable to a remote futurity in the face of certain stubborn facts. As an inspired, intoxicated youth, Mill “thought it more urgent to reach that terminus [in the not too distant future], whereas later he thought it less urgent to reach it and that it was very far distant indeed.”²⁷

The notion that Mill’s methods shifted while his goals remained constant was fully developed by Joseph Hamburger in *Liberty and Control*. Hamburger identified *The Spirit of the Age* as a work in which Mill tipped his hand to reveal “something like a utopian desire.”²⁸ Under the influence of Comtean historicism, Mill drew a parallel between the revolutionary conditions of France in 1789 and those of England in 1831. More specifically, “England lagged behind a generation, and he and other radicals—bold freethinking opponents of church, crown, and aristocracy—were...playing the role of *philosophes*, not eager for violence but dreaming of transformation.”²⁹ Like his mentors James Mill and Jeremy Bentham, John Mill was a *soi-disant* radical who deplored violence but wanted to transform society and thereby “reform the world.” His disappointment with the results of the Reform Act and his impatience with a doubting humanity led him to abandon the florid rhetoric in *The Spirit of the Age* but not the ultimate goal—the “moral regeneration of mankind.” Moreover, Mill “continued to regard his own time as having features of what in 1831 he began calling a transitional age, and he continued to visualize ways in which a natural or organic state of society could supersede the transitional state.”³⁰

²⁶ Alan Ryan, introduction to *Mill: The Spirit of the Age, On Liberty, The Subjection of Women* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), xxv. Ryan’s pairing of the early, “authoritarian” Mill with the mature, “libertarian” and “feminist” Mill is suggestive.

²⁷ Alan Ryan, “Bureaucracy, Democracy, and Liberty: Some Unanswered Questions in Mill’s Politics,” in *J. S. Mill’s Political Thought: A Bicentennial Reassessment*, ed. Nadia Urbinati and Alex Zakaras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 159.

²⁸ Joseph Hamburger, *John Stuart Mill on Liberty and Control* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 109.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 111.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 193–94.

The “natural” or “organic” state that Mill dreamed of would be marked by a broad consensus on matters of morals, politics, and the socially desirable—an age in which theological and metaphysical modes of thought would give way to “positivist” or scientific ones. Conversely, theistic religion would in time be eclipsed by “the religion of humanity” as the unifying ideology of a new secular order. Mill’s hostility to religion in general, and Christianity in particular, is almost entirely confined to his private papers, as are his references to “the religion of humanity.” According to Hamburger, Mill understood that it was necessary to conceal both this hostility and his hopes for the future if he was to command an audience in a “transitional” (and Victorian) age. Since his “long-range goals and expectations could have been inferred from [his criticism of religion], and...[he] thought revealing such things was rhetorically foolish,” Mill excluded *The Spirit of the Age* from his first volume of collected essays, *Dissertations and Discussions* (1859).³¹ Had he included it, the jarring contrast with *On Liberty* (also published in 1859) may have exposed the deeper purpose concealed beneath Mill’s bold libertarianism. Despite appearances, it was not liberty for its own sake or mere pluralism that Mill ultimately championed in *On Liberty*, but liberty as a means of hastening the demise of the erroneous opinions, baneful institutions, and retrograde practices of a “transitional” age. On the other hand, the “natural” or “organic” society idealized in *The Spirit of the Age*—a society marked by a widespread consensus articulated by an intellectual elite—appears far removed from the cultural pluralism (putatively) championed in *On Liberty*. As Hamburger observes, the perceived contrast between the two positions “would [also] have raised questions about how liberty would survive in a natural, organic state of society, which of course has close affinities with the religion of humanity.”³²

As noted above, Hamburger’s ground-breaking study was widely reviewed, but his provocative thesis has not had the impact one might expect from a work by a veteran Mill scholar. In his intellectual biography of Mill, Capaldi ignores Hamburger and downplays the significance of *The Spirit of the Age*, where Mill merely “questioned whether the lack of an authoritative center in liberal culture was a good thing.”³³ As we shall see, Mill considered just such an “authoritative center” the sine qua non of a post-transitional society. Similarly, Capaldi

³¹ Ibid., 211.

³² Ibid., 212.

³³ Nicholas Capaldi, *John Stuart Mill: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 99.

concedes that “Mill advocated the need for cultural elitism,”³⁴ yet Mill’s elitism was hardly confined to “cultural” matters. More importantly, there is little effort to address the broader issues raised by Hamburger or reassess Mill’s liberal credentials.³⁵ The same may be said of a collection of essays on Mill’s political thought published to commemorate the bicentennial of his birth. Among the fourteen contributors only Alan Ryan mentions *The Spirit of the Age*, and Hamburger is ignored by all, the victim of an apparent conspiracy of silence.³⁶

The intention here is to challenge this silence by taking seriously the claim that Mill never abandoned the radicalism and elitism found in *The Spirit of the Age*—that the essay is neither a youthful aberration nor an intellectual anomaly. The first step is a close reading of *The Spirit of the Age*, which has been alternatively ignored, dismissed, and enlisted by scholars, but never subjected to sustained analysis. Since so much of the debate over Mill’s reputation as a liberal thinker turns on whether he abandoned or retained the doctrines in *The Spirit of the Age*, a clear statement of its teaching will serve as a touchstone for addressing the broader question. It will also reveal a thinker at stark variance with the popular image of a faithful defender of “cultural pluralism” and the “open society.”³⁷

The essay itself appeared seriatim in seven installments (essays four and five were in two parts) between January 9 and May 29 of 1831 in the London-based *Examiner* and occupies forty-four pages in the *Collected Works*. In the

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

³⁵ For the little distrust he does show towards “rule by experts,” Capaldi is chided by Rosen, who “find[s] no echo” of an authoritarian scientific elite in Mill and blithely assigns such forebodings to a “fail[ure] to capture Mill’s aspirations for ethology” (*Mill*, 86). In fact, there is far more than an “echo” of elite rule and social engineering in Mill’s ethology, which is arguably the most dubious feature of his social theory. Similarly, Miller chides Hamburger for his “somewhat fantastic worries about the elite’s exercising control over the rest of society through shame.” Yet it is just such *informal* controls working in tandem with his more *formal* ethological aspirations (not Mill’s alleged political elitism, which for Miller “is a far more plausible concern”) that complicates (and compromises) Mill’s liberalism for Hamburger (Miller, *J. S. Mill*, 187).

³⁶ See Urbinati and Zakaras, eds., *J. S. Mill’s Political Thought*. This neglect is not entirely surprising, for as John Gibbons observes, “the unresolved tensions, incoherencies, inconsistencies, and even contradictions within Mill’s corpus” have resisted repeated attempts to resolve them (Gibbons, “J. S. Mill, Liberalism, and Progress,” in *Victorian Liberalism: Nineteenth-Century Political Thought and Practice*, ed. Richard Bellamy [London: Routledge, 1987], 91).

³⁷ Mill’s close association with “pluralism” and the “open society” is largely owing to influential works by Isaiah Berlin and Karl Popper. Yet as Richard Vernon points out (and *The Spirit of the Age* confirms), “Mill did not believe that the case for liberty rested on Berlinian pluralism any more than it rested on Popperian fallibilism” (Vernon, “J. S. Mill and the Religion of Humanity,” in *Religion, Secularization and Political Thought: Thomas Hobbes to J. S. Mill*, ed. James E. Crimmins [London: Routledge, 1989], 176). Popper was critical of Mill in his Comtean (historicist) phase, but read *On Liberty* as an endorsement of the “open society.”

Autobiography, Mill appears to dismiss *The Spirit of the Age*, and yet—significantly—does not attribute the essay's "failure" to any inherent defect in its argument. Rather, he faults the style as ill calculated to stir the imagination of mere "newspaper readers."³⁸ Style aside, the great public agitation preceding the passage of the Reform Bill insured that his revelations would fall on deaf ears. Why then did Mill call attention to this allegedly "embarrassing" work a quarter century later in the *Autobiography*? Perhaps he recognized it as marking a sea-change in his intellectual development, one that would run like a concurrent stream through the sluice of his inherited Utilitarianism.³⁹ (Much of Mill's alleged incoherence and inconsistency can be traced to such intellectual "eclecticism.") His early romance with Comte would blossom into a systematic study of the Frenchman's magnum opus and spark a lengthy correspondence with the prophet himself.⁴⁰ Comte's *excentricités* of thought and conduct would prove too much even for Mill, but the break in correspondence did not mark a rejection of Comtean ideas: radical reform, social transformation, elite leadership, applied social science, and the *culte de humanité* remained leading articles of Mill's visionary creed.

In *The Spirit of the Age*, Mill deployed these "new ideas" to "point out in the character of the present age, the anomalies and evils characteristic of the transition from a system of opinions which had worn out, to another only in the process of being formed." The "new ideas" (as revealed in the *Autobiography*) were those of Comte and the Saint-Simonians, whose vision of reform was anchored in moral-political consensus under the tutelage of an intellectual elite. The mature Mill never rejected these ideas, although he would generally avoid grand historical theorizing and eschew (or conceal) the illiberal and utopian elements of his thought so evident in *The Spirit of the Age*.

³⁸ On this point I am in agreement with Bruce Mazlish, who finds the essay "among the liveliest of Mill's writings" (Mazlish, *James and John Stuart Mill* [New York: Basic Books, 1975], 240).

³⁹ In the *dissecta membra* of the *Autobiography*, Mill recounts the dramatic reversal of his views on the problem of building social and political consensus among the multitude. After his baptism into Saint-Simonism, he "no longer believed that the fate of mankind depended on the possibility of making all of [the people] competent judges of questions of government and legislation. From this time my hopes of improvement rested less on the reason of the multitude, than on the possibility of effecting such an improvement in the method of political and social philosophy, as should enable all thinking and instructed persons who have no sinister interest to be so nearly of one mind on these subjects, as to carry the multitude with them by their united authority" ("Early Draft Rejected Leaves," in *CW*, 1:616).

⁴⁰ In Mill's first letter to Comte, a decade after *The Spirit of the Age*, he confirmed his radical credentials and expressed deep regret "that the revolutionary philosophy, which a dozen or so years ago still was in full swing, today has fallen into neglect before completing its task" (letter of Nov. 8, 1841, in *The Correspondence of John Stuart Mill and Auguste Comte*, trans. Oscar A. Haac [New Brunswick: Transaction, 1995], 36).

When the essays begin to appear in early 1831, Mill had already established himself in London as a formidable prodigy of reform both in print and in debate. Echoing the radical politics of his mentors, he argued in favor of frequent elections, reapportionment, an expanded franchise, free public education, free trade, a free press, and an end to religious disabilities, primogeniture, and entail. While Bentham had insisted that “radicalism [was] not dangerous,” young Mill suggested it might be just that, at least to the “sinister interests” of the privileged few. For example, in defending the interests of the working class—“the majority of the whole population”—he claims he would rather “suffer every other person in the community to starve, rather than [workers] should be inadequately provided with the necessaries of life.”⁴¹ He also advocates the equal or near-equal distribution of wealth “which tends to the general happiness” and “the legislator ought to favor.”⁴² Just how this could be achieved “in every way not inconsistent with that security of property” remains a mystery.

Elsewhere Mill appears to flirt with revolution, even violent revolution, for “the idea of bloodless Revolution is, when rightly considered, visionary and absurd. All great Reforms must injure many private interests, and cannot, therefore, fail to raise many enemies.” While no advocate of mindless violence, he declares it “not mercy but weakness” to spare the enemies of the People.⁴³ He also calls for “the questioning of all established opinions,” particularly religious opinions, in the interest of progress and “the good of mankind,” and warmly anticipates “the downfall of the [established] church in my time.”⁴⁴ The reader of Mill’s early work will find a strain of dogmatism, elitism, and utopianism rarely associated with the author of *On Liberty*. Mill’s *dogmatism* is evident in a contempt for the “stupidity and vulgar prejudice” of obstructionists, while his *elitism* appears in the contrast he draws between “quack politicians” and the “scientific statesman”—a comparison which channels Plato’s *Republic*. Finally, there is Mill’s *utopianism*, his belief in the perfectibility of man and the indefinite improvement of society. According to Mill, “the wisest men of all political and religious opinions...have been something nearly approaching to perfectibilians.” Far from unhinged visionaries,

⁴¹ J. S. Mill, *Journals and Debating Speeches*, in *CW*, vol. 26, ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 369.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 336, 337.

⁴³ J. S. Mill, *Newspaper Writings*, in *CW*, vol. 22, ed. Ann P. Robson and John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 42.

⁴⁴ *Journals and Debating Speeches*, 350, and *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill*, in *CW*, vol. 12, ed. Francis E. Mineka (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), 28.

such men understood that “an extremely high degree of moral and intellectual excellence may be made to prevail among mankind at large.”⁴⁵

Mill was aware that such radical views would be met with incredulity, even outrage, among traditionalists and moderates alike. Before he withdrew from public disputation in 1829, he seemed to welcome the scorn that often greeted his more extreme statements. In one such outburst, he invited his opponents to think the worst of him: “I am content that they should call me radical, revolutionist, anarchist, jacobin, if they please. I am content to be treated as an enemy to establishments, to institutions, and to order.”⁴⁶ While clearly engaging in hyperbole, young Mill was sufficiently extreme to warrant such epithets in the minds of nonradicals, whether Whigs or Tories. As this phase represents Mill’s “apprenticeship,”⁴⁷ the next constitutes his “early” period (1830–1840) in which he rejected Benthamite orthodoxy, explored alternative philosophies, and expanded the scope of his intellectual and social universe. *The Spirit of the Age* is the first fruit of his own “transitional” phase, a striking departure from his earlier efforts, and a performance he never publicly repeated. Prior to this time, Mill (like Bentham and his father) tended to downplay the importance of past “experience” or *history* as a guide to practical reform—whether social, economic, political, or educational. Instead, the utilitarians looked to *human nature* and *environment* as the keys to societal amelioration. Based on an *associationist* psychology and a *hedonistic* theory of behavior, the Utilitarians believed in an almost limitless capacity to mold thought and direct conduct in accordance with the master principle of “the greatest happiness of the greatest number.” Mill never formally abandoned the utilitarian standard, but he did show a greater appreciation for history, particularly recent history, as a guide to practical reform.

This newfound appreciation is apparent in the title Mill chose for his essays, which he borrowed from William Hazlitt, who had cited Ernst Arndt’s *Der Geist der Zeit* in the *Examiner*. (The term “zeitgeist,” often associated with but not used by Hegel, would thus enter into English usage.) For Mill, the “spirit” is not some metaphysical entity leaping across the centuries in the dialectical unfolding of mankind’s destiny, but more akin to the prevailing tendencies and historical movement of the times. Mill’s survey of current conditions led to the sweeping conclusion that the present “is an age of transition,”

⁴⁵ *Journals and Debating Speeches*, 429–30.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁴⁷ For an account of Mill’s “apprentice” years prior to *The Spirit of the Age*, see Quentin Taylor, “Radical Son: The Apprenticeship of John Stuart Mill,” *Humanitas* 26, nos. 1 and 2 (2013): 129–52.

or more specifically, that “the old order of things has become unsuited to the [current] state of society and the human mind” (1:230). The salient feature of the present age is *contradiction*, not as for Marx between the mode and relations of production, but between ideas or mental culture and outdated social, political, and economic doctrines, institutions, and practices. In short, Marx was a materialist, Mill an idealist. Both, however, drew radical consequences from their historical analysis.⁴⁸ While Mill says nothing of the Industrial Revolution or the rapid transformation of material life in 1830s Britain, he does predict that “the nineteenth century will be known to posterity as the era of one of the greatest revolutions of which history has preserved remembrance, in the human mind, and in the whole constitution of human society” (1:228–29). Mill was hardly alone in this grandiose prediction, and like Comte, Hegel, and Marx, he came to view *history*, and particularly *recent* history, as “the fountain of prophecy—the only key to the history of posterity” (1:229).

And yet Mill never resigned himself to armchair divination, content to passively delight in the magisterial march of the “Spirit.” If the present is prologue to the future, it is also a *call to action*, for “only through [a knowledge of the present] is it in our power to influence that which is to come” (1:229). As such, Mill anticipated Marx, who famously declared, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past.”⁴⁹ Like Marx, Mill utterly rejected the status quo, denounced contemporary institutions as “vicious in both outline and in details,” and boldly announced that “they shall be renovated, and purified, and made fit for civilized man” (1:230). He did not, of course, embrace violent revolution, dictatorship of the proletariat, or abolition of private property, or dream away the existence of the state.⁵⁰ Moreover, there is a *monumental* dimension to Mill’s use of “history

⁴⁸ Mill, like Marx, “looks forward to the day when progress by opposition will no longer be necessary, that is when positive truth in matters of morals and politics will be attained. The positivist, like the classical Marxist, believes in the relativity of all forms of thought except the ultimate one” (Ben Knights, “The Construction of Opinion: John Stuart Mill,” in *The Idea of the Clerisy in the Nineteenth Century* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978], 162).

⁴⁹ Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 595.

⁵⁰ Marx and Mill have been the subject of considerable comparative analysis. See Graeme Duncan, *Marx and Mill: Two Views of Social Conflict and Social Harmony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), and Paul Smart, *Marx and Mill: Individual Liberty and Roads to Freedom* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991).

for life” that is missing in Marx—like Nietzsche, Mill reserved an honored place for talent and genius.⁵¹

The specific measures advanced by the Radicals were part of a larger program to reform a corrupt and outmoded society by removing the “anti-quoted,” the “irrational,” and the “sinister” from the body politic. Mill embraced an even loftier vision that soared beyond political action to behold the more distant vistas of social transformation. In doing so, he overshot key articles of the Benthamite creed. *The Spirit of the Age*, which neither calls for specific reforms nor bewails the abuses of the times, embodies this transcendent flight. For Mill, present reform efforts are “but indications which tell of a more vital and radical change” to come (1:230). The old doctrines, institutions, and leaders have fallen into disrepute, but society still awaits the imposition of the new. Such “vital” and “radical” change will entail more than simply correcting the most flagrant abuses and tinkering with “the machine.” “Society demands...not merely a new machine, but a new machine constructed in another manner” (1:231). Clearly Mill envisioned a comprehensive program that would not merely reform society, but transform it from what it was into what it might be—indeed, into what it had never been before: “the state of society I contemplate has never yet had existence.”⁵²

Mill likens the present lack of consensus in “doctrine” (whether political or moral) to a state of “intellectual anarchy” (1:233). Men may discuss and reason more than ever before but it has not made them a great deal wiser: abandoning false doctrines does not insure their replacement by true ones.⁵³ Unlike nonphilosophical (“plebeian”) reformers, Mill did not congratulate the mass of his “thinking and reading” countrymen on their newfound enlightenment. In a paraphrase of Burke (whom he both hated and admired), Mill writes: “Before I compliment a man or a generation upon having got rid

⁵¹ On the basis of his elitist cultural politics, Mill has been placed in the nineteenth-century tradition of “aristocratic liberalism,” alongside Tocqueville and Burkhart, neither of whom, however, indulged in Mill’s utopian scientism. See Alfred S. Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism: The Social and Political Thought of Jacob Burkhart, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Toqueville* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Nietzsche, who excoriated Mill and English utilitarianism, espoused a more virulent form of cultural elitism which bypassed liberalism altogether. See Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

⁵² *Journals and Debating Speeches*, 305.

⁵³ In a letter to Thomas Carlyle, who referred to the author of *The Spirit of the Age* as a “new mystic,” Mill dismissed the idea that “truth will out” through unfettered expression in the marketplace of ideas. “I have not any great notion of the advantage of what the ‘free discussion’ men call the ‘collision of opinions,’ it being my creed that the Truth is sown and germinates in the mind itself, and is not to be struck out suddenly like fire from a flint by knocking another hard body against it” (letter of May 18, 1833, in *Earlier Letters*, 153).

of their prejudices, I require to know what they have substituted in lieu of them” (1:233). Ideally, the many will come to embrace “true opinions” in matters of morals and politics—a solution strikingly similar to the one adopted in Plato’s *Republic*. Since the many can never be philosophically enlightened (i.e., understand the grounds of their knowledge), they must be brought to accept true opinions instead.⁵⁴

Precisely what makes a moral or political opinion “true” or “false” Mill does not say. As a Utilitarian, he presumably agreed with the Burkean formulation of the nature of moral and political phenomena. “Political problems do not primarily concern truth or falsehood. They relate to good [happiness] or evil [unhappiness]. What in the result is likely to produce evil [unhappiness] is politically false; that which is productive of good [happiness], politically true.”⁵⁵ Yet Mill espoused a more rigorous, scientific notion of moral and political truth, and adopted something like the principle of falsifiability as a standard of verification. On the other hand, he suggests that “true” and “false” opinions may be so “originally,” or may “become so by change of circumstances” (1:233). In either case, it is clear that Mill believed morals and politics were “sciences” capable of rational demonstration. This belief is among the most distinct and curious features of *The Spirit of the Age* and of Mill’s philosophy in general. Near the end of the first essay he notes that just as “physical science” is advancing in truth, so too “the moral and social sciences” (1:234). That the parallel between physical and social science is not merely analogical is revealed in the second essay. Here Mill takes the former as the model for the latter, not so much as a *method* of discovering truth but for the *consensus* it has generated among scientists and the *authority* it exercises over the layman’s “thoughts and...actions.” It is precisely this consensus and authority in the *physical* sciences that Mill sets as the goal of the *moral* and *social* sciences; indeed, it is “what is to be hoped for and laboured for in all other departments of human knowledge; and what, beyond all possibility of doubt, will one day be attained” (2:239).

Did Mill’s vision of a robust social science include the creation of a new orthodoxy in morals and politics as an anodyne to the “intellectual anarchy”

⁵⁴ I am hardly alone in noting the strongly Platonic flavor of Mill’s elitist intellectualism. “Mill thus refloats the Platonic distinction between knowledge (which pertains to an elite) and opinion (which pertains to the masses) upon positivist waters. He is dealing with one of the outstanding problems of an advanced society...but his solution runs perilously close to the devaluation of any but philosophic knowledge. Common sense and the judgment of the half-instructed are dangerous” (Knights, *Idea of the Clerisy*, 147).

⁵⁵ Edmund Burke, “An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs,” in *Further Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Daniel E. Ritchie (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1992), 163.

of the present? Even before his encounter with the Saint-Simonians, Mill accepted the Benthamite conviction that politics, like morals, could be reduced to a science, as well as the principle of elite intellectual leadership. In *The Spirit of the Age*, he greatly expanded on these notions under the spell of Comtean historicism. The *scientism* Mill had absorbed under the tutelage of Bentham and his father hypertrophied under the influence of Comte, and found expression in a yearning for a kind of “intellectual directorate” in the public arena, albeit one accepted voluntarily by the half- and uninstructed many.⁵⁶ The realm of physical science, where “we never hear of the right of private judgment,” represents the model to which social science must aspire (2:239). In the present “transitional” state, the instructed are themselves divided on questions of morals and politics, and the “uninstructed lose their faith in them” (2:228). This is not altogether regrettable, for it begets an increase in “discussion” and “private judgment,” and removes a good deal of nonsense in public opinion. As such it is a necessary step in the march of mankind toward a new and better “natural” state of society.⁵⁷

A leading feature of this new social order—indeed, what makes it possible—is a consensus among the learned on morals and politics. This consensus will be passed on to the laity in the form of a body of “received opinion” on all matters touching the common good (2:240). Just as the nonscientific public readily accepts the authority of professional scientists, so the nonphilosophic many will come to accept the authority of professional philosophers—once they themselves reach agreement on social doctrine. But why is this both necessary and “natural”? In the first essay, Mill asserts that social progress is dependent upon the *leadership of the few* and the *willingness of the many* to follow them: “if the multitude of one age are nearer to the truth than the multitude of another, it is only so far as they are guided and influenced by the authority of the wisest among them” (1:234). The many are disqualified from acquiring true wisdom not so much from any inherent defectiveness as from the necessity of daily toil—as such, the vast majority will be half-educated at best. This leaves the field of social and moral science open to those with the

⁵⁶ As the leading study of Mill's encounter with French thought concludes, Mill “came dangerously close to an acceptance of the intellectual directorate, actually the intellectual dictatorship, which the Saint-Simonians and Comte purported to be the means of achieving a cohesive society” (Iris W. Mueller, *John Stuart Mill and French Thought* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956], 69).

⁵⁷ As he explained to a friend and fellow traveler, “In the present age of transition, everything must be subordinate to *freedom of inquiry*: if your opinions, or mine, are right, they will in time be unanimously adopted by the instructed classes, and *then* it will be time to found the national creed upon the assumption of their truth” (Mill to John Sterling, Oct. 20–22, 1831, in *Earlier Letters*, 77).

intelligence and leisure to “dedicate themselves to the investigation and study of physical, moral, and social truths, as their peculiar calling” (2:242).

Will such elites occupy an “official” position in the future polity? Will they constitute a kind of Royal Society or Brain Trust? Even earlier Mill had rejected the idea of an official *cognoscenti* and he never assigns them such a role in *The Spirit of the Age*.⁵⁸ Yet he never renounced the desirability of an intellectual elite (Comte’s *pouvoir spirituel*) as a quasi-authoritative body of opinion makers. Given his assumptions about the nature of social and moral knowledge it was logically required that he retain a place for such a body in his public philosophy. If mankind’s progress requires a return to a “natural” state characterized by agreement on “nearly the whole field of the moral relations of man,” there must be “a large body of received doctrine...which no one thinks of questioning, backed as it is by the authority of all, or nearly all, supposed to possess knowledge enough to qualify them for giving an opinion on the subject” (2:244–45). It is the especial role of those so qualified to provide this doctrine and render it authoritative for the uninitiated.

While Mill stresses the importance of general compliance with “received doctrine” as handed down by social philosophers, he does not advocate “slavish deference” to their teaching. In this he is not entirely consistent. Mill advises the layman to “think for yourself” but only with the understanding that doing so will rarely lead to a knowledge of the philosophical grounds (the ultimate reasons) upon which received doctrine rests (2:241). (Just why the possession of *philosophical* knowledge by a directing elite is necessary for human progress Mill never explains.) Where his understanding ends, the layman must place his trust in the judgment of his intellectual betters, and defer to “the authority of those who have made moral and social philosophy their peculiar study” (2:244). Moreover, the injunction to “think for yourself” is for Mill less a call to independence of judgment than the proviso of a “transitional” age—a temporary indulgence that will progressively yield to a habitual deference to a “united body of grave and commanding authority.” “Learn, and think for yourself, is reasonable advice for the day: but let not the business of the day be so done as to prejudice the work of tomorrow” (2:245).⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Mill’s elite would not be drawn from the current establishment or imposed from above, but exercise an “insensible influence of mind over mind” through “private communication, the pulpit, & the press” (Mill to Gustave d’Eichthal, Nov. 7, 1829, in *Earlier Letters*, 41). Otherwise, “the social setting of this elite remained extremely vague” but no less necessary for this fact (Van Holthoon, *Road to Utopia*, 117).

⁵⁹ In his correspondence, Mill was even more dismissive of the dictum “think for yourself” and the pretensions of *l’homme moyen sensuel* to intellectual independence. He had little more than contempt

And what is the work of tomorrow? Nothing, it would seem, short of “a moral and social revolution.” For Mill the first stages of this revolution will prepare the ground for the consensus of elites and herald the beginning of the new, “natural” age. The precise relation between the two is unclear, but Mill openly relishes the coming *reign of elites*: “the first men of the age will one day join hands and be agreed: and then there is no power on earth or in hell itself, capable of withstanding them” (2:245). If the reign of elites is Mill’s Pentecost, the Revolution is his Advent.

But ere this can happen there must be a change in the whole framework of society, as at present constituted. Worldly power must pass from the hands of the stationary part of mankind into those of the progressive part. There must be a moral and social revolution, which shall, indeed, take away no men’s lives or property, but which shall leave to no man one fraction of unearned distinction or unearned importance. (2:245)

Again, it is difficult to see how a “change in the whole framework of society,” the transfer of “worldly power,” and a “moral and social revolution,” could leave “men’s lives or property” undisturbed. Even before *The Spirit of the Age*, Mill had declared himself in favor of nationalization of land and the redistribution of wealth, and proclaimed “the idea of a bloodless Revolution... visionary and absurd. All great Reforms must injure many private interests.” Perhaps Mill simply hoped that radical reforms, like those of Solon and Cleisthenes, might be effected without undue violence or social upheaval. Perhaps he was simply too vague, for he neither provides historical examples nor specifies the relation between the means and ends of the envisioned transformation. Mill is, however, clear about its desirability, indeed, its historical necessity, for “man cannot achieve his destiny but through such a transformation, and that it will and shall be effected” (2:245). And while it may be “a fearful thing” to contemplate such profound changes, the “force of circumstances” rather than the “wisdom of mankind” will likely point out “the easiest and most obvious” course “in a moment of emergency.” This historical resolution, like the *deus ex machina* of antique drama, fits uneasily with Mill’s Enlightenment faith in the ability of reason to shape mankind’s destiny.

In the third essay, Mill expands on the characteristics of the “natural” and the “transitional” state. The former is ascendant when “worldly power” and “moral influence” are united in the hands of the most capable and

for “making every man his own guide & sovereign-master, & letting him think for himself & do exactly as he judges best for himself, giving other men leave to persuade him if they can by evidence, but forbidding him to give way to authority” (Mill to John Sterling, Oct. 20–22, 1831, in *Earlier Letters*, 84).

qualified, and when the many acquiesce in their authority (3:252). An inversion of this condition prevails in a “transitional” state where worldly power is exercised by the less fit, and moral influence is blunted by the “chaos” of opinions. This is the condition Britain (and most of Europe) finds itself in. “And this [state] continues until a moral and social revolution (or it may be, a series of such) has replaced worldly power and moral influence in the hands of the most competent: when society is once more in its natural state, and resumes its onward progress” (3:253). Mill distinguishes his vision of “onward progress” from that of “plebeian” reformers who merely seek to transfer power and resources from one social class to another. His vision is more radical and wide-ranging: it encompassed a moral and social reform well beyond piecemeal political and economic adjustment. Mill envisioned a *spiritual* reformation of epochal significance culminating in the “regeneration of mankind.” Years later, in “The Stationary State” (1848), he would adumbrate his vision of the fully humanized society.⁶⁰

While rhapsodizing over the shape of things to come, young Mill espied the advent of a new and final stage of historical development. As a committed believer in “the doctrine of the indefinite progressiveness of the human mind” (1:234), he beheld few limits to the heights to which humanity might soar. While perhaps not as utopian as Marx, he did project a state of affairs highly favorable to “rapid advancement” and foresaw an emerging social climate superior to “counteracting forces” hostile to further progress (3:253). Both thinkers also adopted a historicist philosophy of human development (Mill from Comte, Marx from Hegel) with revolutionary and millenarian consequences. Mill’s version even shares a dialectical aspect insofar as he conceives the movement of history in terms of *conflict* and *contradiction*, and projects its advance (prior to its final stage) without humanity’s conscious or collective effort. Finally, both envisaged this final stage through an eschatological lens—the *quantitative* giving place to the *qualitative*, the first chapter in mankind’s true history. It is unlikely that Mill had read Hegel (who died in the same year *The Spirit of the Age* appeared) but progressive-historicist ideas were in the air. “The institutions of our ancestors served passably well for our ancestors, and that from no wisdom of theirs; but from a cause to which, I am afraid, nearly all the good institutions which have ever existed, owed their origin, namely the force of circumstances” (3:257). While not quite “the

⁶⁰ “The Stationary State,” a brief chapter in the famed *Principles of Political Economy*, is a striking (if overlooked) testament to the sincerity and persistence of Mill’s utopian aspirations. See CW, vol. 3, ed. John Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), 753–57.

cunning of reason,” Mill’s “force of circumstances” moves men to act in ways unreflective of conscious goals, much less “wisdom.”⁶¹

For Mill, the ever-growing conviction that the current elite was unfit to wield worldly power signaled the death-rattle of the old order and the eclipse of the transitional age. From here it was but a step to “see a termination to hereditary monarchy and hereditary aristocracy.” Mill does not call for their termination as such, for they are already marked for extinction: “the ultimate fate of such distinctions [of rank] is already decided” (3:280, 281). The survival of both into the twenty-first century (if only in titular form) may have surprised Mill. He was correct in predicting their functional demise within a few generations, but it is doubtful that he would view their successors as greatly superior. This aside, Mill was convinced that no substantial improvement in conditions was possible until the current ruling class (whose power resided in landed and commercial wealth) was replaced by a “natural” elite composed of the most competent, learned, and principled members of society.

So when did the last “natural” age end and the present “transitional” age begin? Mill is short and vague on details, but he does identify the Christian Middle Ages as “natural,” both with respect to worldly power and moral influence. He is, however, far from glorifying medieval society as had become *de rigueur* among European Romantics. Compared to the present age, the medieval era was “a rude age,” rife with violence, brutality, ignorance, and superstition (3:256). And yet the princes and prelates who then ruled were in fact the best the times could afford, if woefully inadequate by any enlightened standard. Here we find Mill at his most *historicist* and *relativist*. It may have been possible, for example, to “conceive” the idea of “responsible government” in the Middle Ages, but “it could not have been realized. Several antecedent stages in civilization had previously to be passed through” (3:257). Mill appears to have injected a dose of materialism into his idealist philosophy. Do ideas drive the *Geist* or do material-social conditions? Is there a pattern, or “law” of historical development? In passing, Mill does contrast the “law” of prescription (or hereditary right) with the “law” of how “political power descends” (3:258). The latter is not (as it was for Hegel) a metaphysical process in which human beings act as unwitting tools of a higher purpose, but rather a function of *merit* fitted to *circumstances*, and working on behalf of human *progress*. Their differences aside, the visions of the two thinkers share much

⁶¹ Comparisons of Mill and Hegel are understandably rare, but as Ronald Beiner notes, “J. S. Mill’s political thought is fundamentally synthetic; not unlike Hegel, he takes opposing perspectives and tries to forge them into an encompassing whole” (“John Stuart Mill’s Project,” 266).

in common: both found the meaning of history in the unfolding of reason and the fulfillment of mankind's destiny in a rationally directed society.

In the fourth and fifth essays, Mill turns from "worldly power" to "moral influence" as traditionally exercised by the wise and virtuous (real or supposed), the clergy, and the rulers themselves (4:290). Throughout the Middle Ages these three sources of moral influence largely reinforced one another.⁶² The onset of the Reformation spelled the end of moral consensus among elites in much of Europe, including England. According to Mill, England got along "tolerably well" until the Glorious Revolution, after which the quality of leadership went into marked decline (5:314). With this verdict Mill turns the famous Whig interpretation of history on its head. Far from ushering in an era of national greatness or securing the "rights of Englishmen," post-Stuart Britain seethed with *fainant* kings, feckless aristocrats, and a parasitic clergy. For Mill, the *seventeenth century* was the great age of English statesmanship, when "the expression, natural leaders of the people [still] has some meaning" (3:282). The expression was now emptied of all meaning. The conditions of leadership in a "natural" society "have now ceased to be fulfilled" (5:314).

Did Mill point to any other Western societies, before or after the Middle Ages, that approximated a "natural" state of society? The ancient commonwealths of Athens and Rome—in their best periods—are cited as past examples, the United States as a living one. Mill's discussion of these is cursory and superficial but underscores his obsession with the moral and political authority of a "natural" elite. In Athens and Rome this authority was rooted in "the wisdom of the ancestors." "The authority of the ancestors, so deeply revered at Athens and Rome, was the authority of the best and wisest men for many successive generations" (4:291, 293). Mill's emphasis on ancestral authority stands in sharp contrast to his radical and repeated attacks on the "dead hand" of tradition. In spite of his democratic rhetoric (which was not always at one with his logic), Mill justified moral and political authority based on *merit*, for in these ancient commonwealths ancestral authority did not exceed its "just weight," nor "supersede reason, but guided it" (4:293).

Mill's comments on the United States, which he never visited, betray a superficial familiarity with its history and politics. Determined to find a "natural" congruity between a people and its leaders, he cites Americans' wise choice of presidents and their collective satisfaction "with their institutions,

⁶² As Van Holthoon notes, Mill's "interpretation of medieval history is highly problematical, but historical truth is not the point of it. The interpretation served the purpose of prophecy" (*Road to Utopia*, 113).

and their rulers” (3:254). Apparently Mill was unfamiliar with the tumultuous politics of the 1790s and beyond—the heated rivalries, bitter partisanship, and sectionalism that would in time tear the nation apart.

Most astonishing, however, is Mill's identification of the medieval Catholic clergy as a prototype of moral influence in a “natural” state of society.⁶³ In the fifth essay, Mill—agnostic, anticlerical, and disestablishmentarian—examines the clergy as a *spiritual* (as opposed to a *temporal*) source of moral authority “sufficient to extort acquiescence from the uninquiring, or uninformed majority” (5:304–5). As with the medieval nobility, Mill makes no attempt to excuse or conceal the abuses of the church. The whitewashing brush is provided by Comtean historicism, for whatever its abuses the “Catholic clergy...were, in point of fact, the fittest persons who *could* have possessed” moral authority at the time (5:306). Vices aside—though “great and flagrant”—the clergy were a “civilizing and humanizing” force in a society that lacked the means of producing anything better. What Mill admired about the Catholic clergy was its possession of moral influence based on superior learning and a paternal, universalist ethic. At their best, priests and prelates were protohumanists who preserved classical learning, admonished the rich and powerful, comforted the poor and lowly, and provided a necessary degree of moral coherence for a “rude age.” Like Comte, whose own Utopia was led by a *faux catholique* priesthood, Mill toyed with the idea of an (unofficial) “clerisy” that would serve much the same function as the medieval clergy.⁶⁴

Inculcating the natural equality of mankind, and the superiority of love and sacrifice above mere courage and bodily prowess, for menacing the great with the only terrors to which they were accessible, and speaking to their consciences in the name of the only superior whom they acknowledged, in behalf of the low. (5:306)

Of course, Mill's clerisy will have jettisoned the theological trappings of Christianity and presumably have no authority to punish those who run afoul of the Religion of Humanity. The power to damn and burn is “by no means one of those peculiarities of a natural state of society which I am at all

⁶³ The idea of a “clerisy,” the rule of the learned and wise, was developed by Coleridge, and shared strong affinities with the intellectual elitism of Comte. Mill zestfully imbibed and critically engaged both thinkers following his break with orthodox Benthamism. See Knights, *Idea of the Clerisy*, 140–77.

⁶⁴ It is “astonishing” in terms of Mill's hostility to the Established Church, the clergy, and revealed religion, as well his Benthamite scorn for the Middle Ages. Like so much “new” in *The Spirit of the Age*, Mill's departure in this regard owed much to his encounter with Comte and Coleridge.

anxious to see restored” (3:305). (This is the single droll comment in an otherwise humorless tract.)⁶⁵ Yet as Mill observes in *On Liberty* and elsewhere, moral suasion in the form of shame and ostracism will serve a similar function in the future secularized society.⁶⁶ In *The Spirit of the Age*, however, the relationship between the clerisy and the unlearned is more happily likened to that of a benign Scots pastor and his lay neighbor, who “defers...though with no slavish deference, to the opinions of his minister.” And why? Because he freely recognizes the minister as

more versed in the particular subject—as being probably a wiser, and possibly, a better man than himself. This is not the influence of an interpreter of religion, as such; it is that of a purer heart, and a more cultivated intelligence. It is not the ascendancy of a priest: it is the combined authority of a professor of religion, and an esteemed private friend. (5:312–13).

Even in this example, it is not *religious*, but *intellectual* and *moral* superiority that accounts for the pastor’s influence and the deference of the layman. (Here Mill suggestively conceives elite tutelage and lay deference in terms of “combined authority”—a reciprocal and affective, if asymmetrical, social bond.) Mill hastens to add that this model of relations, while applicable to other dissenting sects in England, is not applicable to the state-backed Established Church, which he condemns as a “kind of appendage of the aristocracy” (5:313). As noted above, young Mill anticipated disestablishment in his lifetime, an event that would help clear the ground for the “moral and social revolution” looming on the horizon. The ruling classes had long forfeited the privilege of ruling, “they have flung away their advantages,” and the people at large are ripe for “self-government; for the rational management of their own affairs” (5:315, 314). Yet the nation’s entrenched and privileged few retain sufficient power to impede the proliferation of new “received doctrines” and generally obstruct the march of humanity. Mill concludes *The Spirit of the Age* with a resounding call for the removal of such “sinister interests.”

They must, therefore, be divested of the monopoly of worldly power, ere the most virtuous and best-instructed of the nation will acquire that ascendancy over the opinions and feelings of the rest, by which alone England can emerge from this crisis of transition, and enter once again into a natural state of society. (5:316)

⁶⁵ The “comical seriousness” that a contemporary observed in Mill’s moral and intellectual fastidiousness was perceived to issue from a mind possessed of “that eschatological sense that leads so easily to a humorless earnestness felt to be required by the historical crisis” (Knights, *Idea of the Clerisy*, 154).

⁶⁶ This feature of Mill’s “liberalism,” so at odds with his reputation as a moral pluralist in the realm of “self-regarding” acts, has been thoroughly documented in Hamburger, *John Stuart Mill*, 166–202.

Mill was here referring to the pending Reform Bill, but electoral reform was but a first step. His gaze was fixed on a posterity that few of his contemporaries could imagine, much less grasp. It will take “a far deeper insight into the futurity which waits for us” to see beyond current reform efforts. It will require an acute understanding of national character, “a careful survey of the English national mind” (5:316) to discern the “future fate of our country.” This in turn will require a new science, what Mill calls *ethology*, the science of *character formation* in both the individual and collective (national) sense. Such a science will give educators (and the intellectual elite who train them) the ultimate tool in molding the thoughts and actions of the laity: “When the circumstances of an individual or of a nation are in any considerable degree under our control, we may, by our knowledge of tendencies, be enabled to shape those circumstances in a manner much more favorable to the ends we desire.”⁶⁷ Mill would outline this character-forming science in his *System of Logic* (1843) where physical science is again hailed as the model for moral and social science: “*The backward state of the Moral Sciences can only be remedied by applying to them the methods of Physical Science, duly extended and generalized.*”⁶⁸ Although Mill never carried out this task, his outline of ethology links the *Logic* with *The Spirit of the Age*, the young with the mature Mill, who nourished the vision of an intellectual-scientific elite as the repository of moral and social authority.⁶⁹ The author of the *Logic* may have exchanged his revolutionary rhetoric for the language of science, but as the following passage illustrates, it was but old wine in new bottles.

As the strongest propensities of uncultivated or half-cultivated human nature (being purely selfish ones, and those of a sympathetic character which partake most of the nature of selfishness) evidently tend in themselves to disunite mankind, not to unite them,—to make them rivals, not confederates; social existence is only possible by a disciplining of those more powerful propensities, which consists in subordinating them to a common system of opinions. The degree of this subordination is the measure of the completeness of the social union, and the nature of the common opinions determines its kind.

⁶⁷ J. S. Mill, *A System of Logic*, in *CW*, vol. 8, ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 869.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 833.

⁶⁹ Based on a thorough study of Mill's works and correspondence, Raeder concludes that “there is no reason to believe he ever fully disavowed either Saint-Simon's philosophy of history or his conception of a spiritual power” (*John Stuart Mill*, 47). Mill may have removed a number of admiring references to Comte in successive editions of the *Logic* but (as T. R. Wright notes) “his substantial reliance on Comte for historical method remained unaltered” (Wright, *The Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986], 41).

But in order that mankind should conform their actions to any set of opinions, these opinions must exist, must be believed by them. And thus, the state of the speculative faculties, the character of the propositions assented to by the intellect, essentially determines the moral and political state of the community, as we have already seen that it determines the physical.⁷⁰

Scholars will continue to disagree over the persistence of this intoxicating vision—and the presence of certain “illiberal” features—in Mill’s thought, but *The Spirit of the Age* will remain the touchstone for those who contend that “[the] lines of his future work were there laid down.”⁷¹

⁷⁰ *System of Logic*, 926.

⁷¹ Letwin, *Pursuit of Certainty*, 269.

Mary P. Nichols, *Thucydides and the Pursuit of Freedom*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015, vii + 196 pp., \$49.95 (hardcover).

Democracy as a Means of Ascent

JOSEPH ALULIS

NORTH PARK UNIVERSITY

jalulis@northpark.edu

Hobbes called Thucydides “the most politic historiographer that ever writ.”¹ If by that he meant that no historian has ever described the activity of politics better or reflected upon it more deeply, then Mary P. Nichols agrees. The title of her book conveys her interpretation of the fruits of that reflection. Through the eyes of Thucydides, the war between Athens and Sparta and politics as a whole are best seen in terms of a “pursuit of freedom.”

In her introduction Nichols discusses Thucydides’s activity in writing up the war and weighs the competing interpretations of his aims and accomplishment. In the conclusion she considers Thucydides as a member of a political community and treats his digressions in his account of the war as speeches of his own like those he attributes to other Athenian citizens (170). The five chapters in between divide into two groups. The first two chapters present the democratic Athens of Pericles and Diodotus as an image of freedom to be emulated by future generations “for all time.” In the last three chapters she considers two campaigns of the war, Spartan and Athenian respectively, as ventures in pursuit of freedom that had disastrous consequences owing to a want of measure in their commanders. From first to last, she shows Thucydides’s concern with the actions of citizens and statesmen.

¹ *Hobbes’s Thucydides*, ed. Richard Schlatter (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1975), 7.

In the introduction, Nichols distinguishes her approach from both modernists and postmodernists or constructivists. Thucydides gives us not a simple “empirical account of what happened” but an interpretation (9). But “everything cannot be interpretation. If it were, interpretation would be neither necessary nor possible” (12). She also distinguishes herself from some scholars “influenced by” Strauss on the distance “between the city’s self-understanding and the one available to Thucydides.” Just as Thucydides shares in “the restraints of time and place” that limit the view of citizens and statesmen, so they are “more able to share in his freedom” of vision than some think (14).

Nichols sees in the Athens of Pericles’s funeral oration a model for our use. As evidence that Thucydides intended us to see it in his way she notes that he portrays Pericles “as his own model in writing his history” (47). What sets Athens apart and makes it the school of Hellas is the free way of life its democracy makes possible. Freedom means that human beings are “a cause of actions” and not simply moved by the compulsion of nature (5–6, 26). What accounts for human freedom is the faculty of speech or reason and the deliberation it makes possible. “Deliberation gains distance from the compulsion of passion” (53). Hence “freedom is a potential, not a necessity, although it is necessary for full humanity” because it “is the condition of human excellence” (26, 27). The freedom they enjoy means that the virtue of Athenians comes “from within themselves”; it is not a matter of “the compulsion of the law” as is the case with Sparta (35, 34, 176).

Freedom hangs in the balance in the Mytilenean debate not simply because of Cleon’s attack on speech and deliberation (55) but also because of Diodotus’s argument that desire and hope overcome every rational calculation of the good (61). Nichols gives a valuable summary of the range of interpretation of Diodotus’s speech (65–67), so critical because she, like other commentators, sees Diodotus as expressing the thought of Thucydides (65, 68). She argues that implicit in Diodotus’s argument is a warning about the power of eros and hope among the Athenians themselves, soon to be seen in the case of Sicily, and giving such a warning “implies the possibilities of resisting and overcoming the irrational passions that lead to doom” (63). Moreover, she adduces evidence that Diodotus does not think justice as irrelevant as he claims and observes that what Diodotus recommends as advantage is that Athens be “more lenient than justice requires,” in effect, that Athens act with equity (67), and equity is a form of justice.²

² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1137a32–1138a3. Nichols notes the importance of *epieikeia* for the position of the Athenians who speak in Sparta (56, 62).

For Nichols, by the juxtaposition of the cases of Mytilene and Plataea, the latter city falling to Sparta, “Thucydides shows the superiority of Athens” (74). In part this involves the fact that Sparta fails to aid its ally Mytilene because of its poor use of time while strategic considerations prevent Athens from aiding Plataea (74, 76). But she does not consider the case of the Spartan general Salaethus, captured in Mytilene, who promised to secure the safety of Plataea if he is spared (Thuc. 3.36.1).³ Instead, the Athenians summarily execute him. Given the enormous weight Sparta gives to the lives of Spartiates, Salaethus’s offer is to be taken seriously. It is ironic that in this case, Athens does just what it advised the Plataeans not to do in the case of its Theban prisoners at the start of war, namely, proceed “to extremities” (Thuc. 2.6.2). And it is precisely the summary execution of their captives by the Plataeans that makes the Thebans so determined when the city falls to see that they forfeit their lives (Thuc. 3.66.2).

The campaigns of Brasidas into Thrace and of Athens against Sicily are both, in different ways, in pursuit of freedom. As every successful going out implies a safe return, the failure of Brasidas to return to Sparta and the failed homecoming of the Athenian expedition mark both as flawed. In the first case Sparta is insufficiently like Athens to support liberation in Thrace (79). What Sparta fears most at home is the “new thing” (*neōterizein*) Brasidas offers the cities of Thrace (104, 91n16, 95). Brasidas is too free, that is, too independent of his city (79, 104, 138). But his combination of daring and intelligence makes him so unlike the Spartans that a return would be less a true homecoming than is his official internment in Amphipolis (102, 103). Significantly, Nichols notes, the only other public funeral of which Thucydides writes is that of the Athenians killed in the first year of the war (102). Brasidas represents a noble view of his city (80, 96), but by being too free, he contributes to Scione suffering at the hands of Athens the same fate as Melos (103). This “great cost” of Brasidas’s failure is an instance of the tragedy not of politics as such but of political life in his time and place (80).

A similar lack of “measure” as regards freedom, Nichols argues, causes the failure of the Sicilian campaign (133). The “eros for sailing away” that initiates the campaign is rightly described by Nicias as diseased (19, 125, 125n37). Alcibiades arouses this diseased desire and he, like Brasidas, is too free; though by Athenian standards, Brasidas is moderate, by the same

³ References to Thucydides are to *The Landmark Thucydides*, ed. Robert B. Strassler (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

standard Alcibiades represents a true excess.⁴ When Alcibiades chooses to flee rather than, like Socrates, face charges of impiety in Athens (142), the army is entrusted to Nicias who is insufficiently free (21, 140, 149). Nicias is more Spartan than Athenian (139). While Brasidas's noble but unsupported campaign to liberate the Thracian cities is an unwise pursuit of freedom, the Athenian campaign against Sicily is neither noble nor wise. But if the splendid Athens of the first four books is eclipsed by that of the last four, Thucydides has nonetheless left us a record of it for our admiration (183–84).

Nichols sees Thucydides's two digressions, correcting the popular idea of Aristogeiton and Harmodios as tyrant slayers and recounting the flight from Athens and return of Themistocles, as teaching a lesson of moderation (173). Thucydides presents himself as a "model of political restraint" (174).⁵ In the case of Themistocles, this moderation appears in the contrast with Nicias and Alcibiades; Themistocles finds the balance between attachment and independence from his political community (178–79). If a people's aspiration for freedom is to prove beneficial, the statesmen who guide them must possess this virtue (174).

Insofar as philosophy "begins in wonder," Thucydides is to be understood as a philosophic as well as a politic historian: his work records the deeds of a city "worthy of wonder" (35, 58, 79). He is, as Nichols puts it, more concerned with the distinctive than with the universal; the universal in politics is what is true "for the most part" and serves as a foil for the distinctive as admirable. If most are moved by fear and interest, some act for honor and justice (179). In the words of the Athenian poet Sophocles, "Many are the wonders, none is more wonderful than what is man." What makes man a wonder is the capacity for freedom which is the condition for liberal and generous actions such as that which distinguishes the unnamed wife of Admetus (176).

Nichols acknowledges her debt to other scholars, noting it throughout, and makes a valuable contribution to that body of scholarship. Her book offers an imaginative and closely reasoned interpretation of Thucydides which abounds in insightful observation. While this review traces some themes, much more worthy of note awaits the reader.

⁴ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 1277b20–26 and see Nichols, 82.

⁵ Political restraint so distinguishes Thucydides that Nichols suggests that he is responsible for the unexpected moderation Alcibiades shows in restraining the army at Samos from sailing on Athens (163).

Arthur M. Melzer, *Philosophy Between the Lines: The Lost History of Esoteric Writing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014, 464 pp., \$45 (hardcover).

Thinking Through *Philosophy Between the Lines*

JEFFREY A. BERNSTEIN

COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS

jbernste@holycross.edu

I. FINDING MY WAY

Some books secure their import through teaching us things. Other books secure their import through bequeathing to us new or long-forgotten experiences. Still other books secure their import through reflecting our own experiences, conflicts, and desires back to us so that we might better understand ourselves. It can be argued that the greatest books perform some combination of all three. Arthur Melzer's monumental *Philosophy Between the Lines* appears to belong to the first and/or second groups but actually (albeit discreetly) belongs to the third. This is, perhaps, why I have found it so difficult to write anything about it with which I am pleased.

This in no way means that Melzer's book fails to teach us, or remind us, about the history and practice of esotericism—far from it. In fact, the overwhelming success the book has already enjoyed in intellectual circles suggests that many feel an enormous gratitude for, or provocation by, Melzer. As I compose this, *Philosophy Between the Lines* has already enjoyed numerous reviews from the likes of Allan Arkush, Timothy Burns, Paul Cantor, Damon Linker, Harvey Mansfield, David Schaefer, Steven Smith, and Bernard Yack.¹

¹ See Allan Arkush, "Do You Want to Know a Secret?," *Jewish Review of Books*, Summer 2015; Paul Cantor, "Philosophy in a Clown Suit," *Weekly Standard*, Dec. 22, 2014; Damon Linker, "What If Leo

Additionally Peter Minowitz has produced an elegant guest-edited issue of the journal *Perspectives on Political Science* dedicated to exploring Melzer's book.² While the final half has yet to see print (at the writing of this review), the thoughtful work of Francis Fukuyama,³ Norma Thompson, Catherine and Michael Zuckert, Michael Frazer, Adrian Blau, Douglas Burnham, Robert Howse, Larry Arnhart, Miguel Vatter, Roslyn Weiss, Grant Havers, and Peter Augustine Lawler has already appeared in the first half. If this does not constitute an Olympic Dream-Team of commentators, surely nothing does. It is no exaggeration to say that *Philosophy Between the Lines* has—within the context of humanities and social science texts—achieved a timely recognition that only books like Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* and (more recently) Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* have.⁴ This is elite company, to be sure. And whether the commentators emphasize Melzer's pedagogy (Cantor, Smith), his comprehensiveness (Schaefer), the character of his treatment of esotericism (Mansfield, Lawler, Burnham), the manner of his interpretation of historical figures (Burns, Weiss) or of esotericism per se (Frazer, Zuckert & Zuckert), his exceptional willingness to engage thinkers unsympathetic to his thesis (Thompson), his relation to religious esotericism (Vatter, Howse) or religion in general (Havers, Arkush), his relation to Strauss (Blau), his claims about the Enlightenment (Arnhart), or the effect his thesis has on the question of Leo Strauss's relation to contemporary politics (Fukuyama, Linker, Yack), enough serious individuals have dedicated energy to *Philosophy Between the Lines* that it may be said to already amount to a minor classic.

Strauss Was Right?," *The Week*; Harvey C. Mansfield, "Secret Teaching," *Claremont Review of Books* 15, no. 1, <http://www.claremontinstitute.org>; David Lewis Schaefer, review of *Philosophy Between the Lines*, *Review of Politics* 77, no. 2 (2015): 316–18; Steven B. Smith, review of *Philosophy Between the Lines*, *Political Theory* 43, no. 2 (2015): 271–75; Bernard Yack, review of *Philosophy Between the Lines*, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, Oct. 27, 2014, <http://ndpr.nd.edu>. Timothy Burns's review essay is forthcoming in *Polis* 32, no. 2 (2015): 393–411. I thank him for sharing an earlier draft of it with me.

² See *Perspectives on Political Science* 44, no. 3 (2015): 145–203. The following issue of *Perspectives* will continue this symposium with essays by Gabriel Brahm, Maudemarie Clark, Rogers Smith, and Peter Thiel, and a reply by Arthur Melzer. I have not had access to these pieces and, therefore, can only mention them here.

³ Fukuyama's contribution was originally published in *The American Interest*, February 3, 2015.

⁴ See Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987); Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

Melzer's book is a full-scale inquiry into the genesis, causes, and reasons for esoteric writing.⁵ I agree with the aforementioned commentators that this book establishes, beyond any reasonable doubt, the historical existence of writing in such a manner that some will understand an author's true intention while others will not. After Melzer, the denial of that history is preposterous. I also have little (not to say *no*) doubt that Melzer is not, himself, practicing esotericism in this book. That Melzer declares himself to be "no great lover" of esotericism, but rather "seek[s] a restoration not of esoteric writing but of esoteric *reading*" (xii–xiii)—for the purpose of better understanding a crucial dimension of the history of philosophy—is not itself a reason to discount the suspicion that he practices what he preaches. Yet if Melzer intends to produce a defense for acknowledgment of the history of esotericism, it is unclear how writing in that manner would bring clarity to his intention. I believe that readers should adhere as adamantly as Melzer suggests to Strauss's dictum that "reading between the lines is strictly prohibited in all cases where it would be less exact than not doing so."⁶ Nonetheless, questions concerning the author's intent (especially in the context of a book specifically dealing with esotericism) remain inevitable. In order both to aid the interested parties (who have, presumably, read Melzer's book three times) and to remain faithful to Melzer's stated claim in the body of my review, I will place my own relative suspicions in a footnote.⁷

⁵ It is, additionally, supplemented by a 110-page online document of historical *testimonia*. See "A Chronological Compilation of Testimonial Evidence for Esotericism," <http://press.uchicago.edu/sites/melzer/index.html>.

⁶ Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 30.

⁷ By "relative suspicion," I do not mean to indicate that I know what Melzer is up to (if, in fact, he is up to anything). Rather, I merely mean to indicate fruitful avenues for this type of research. That said: [1] The introduction and chapter 1 begin with the fact that the esoteric tradition has been forgotten (1, 11), while chapter 2 begins with bringing our "full attention" to this issue (53). [2] In the final four pages of the book—i.e., in discussing esotericism as "preserving the possibility of return" to premodern philosophy—Melzer states that "I am less certain that I understand Strauss correctly on this point" (363), yet presents it with manifest clarity and passion. [3] Chapter 6 ("Dangerous Truths: Protective Esotericism") and Chapter 7 ("The Educational Benefits of Obscurity: Pedagogical Esotericism")—the central chapters of the central part of the book—form something of a natural pair that deal respectively with "the profoundest issues" (161) and "the most genuinely philosophical" kind of esotericism (205). [4] Melzer both diagnoses the modern intellectual climate (its hostility to the possibility of esotericism) as one plagued by the hyperspecialized economic practice of "division[s] of labor" (230), while later holding that "some amount of division of labor is both possible and necessary in scholarship" (288) as it pertains to learning to read esoterically. [5] In his discussion of Strauss's project—as it involves esotericism—Melzer, in one fell swoop, notes the importance of "the religious question" for Strauss yet decides that "to keep things manageable, I will leave [it] aside" (331). [6] Melzer's treatment of issues concerning (e.g.) the relation between theory and praxis, the "violations" (105) that esotericism brings against modern moral ideals, and specific esoteric practices are all presented via enumeration (77–78, 90–92, 105–6, 125–203, 211–16, 289, 299, 323–24).

The difficulty resides in my insecurity as to whether I can accurately identify what manner of book Melzer's is. Granted, then, that it is not an esoteric work—is it a neutral and objective account of the phenomenon of esotericism? But Melzer has already told us that he seeks to revive a kind of reading long since forgotten; his narrative is, to that extent, engaged. Is it a book of nonesoteric philosophy? If so, then it could only be philosophy in an Enlightenment style. But the Enlightenment agenda (or, ideology) is directly connected to the decline of esoteric reading; if Melzer were undertaking that kind of project, it would surely run counter to the stated aim of his book. Is it a history of philosophy, conventionally understood? If so, Melzer is far too generous towards his potential dissenters.⁸ Melzer refers to his work as “(as it were) a Peace Corps field manual for Western scholars that aims to promote connection with the communicative customs of our distant past” (52). This is certainly a friendly image to use, but it blurs the distinction between the practical aims of Peace Corps activity with the theoretical or contemplative aims characteristic of philosophical works. Moreover (unless I am mistaken), the majority of Melzer's readers are at least familiar with the idea of esotericism if not in agreement with its actuality; Melzer's text is more akin to an *apologia* (“this is why we study it”) or even a *haggadah* (“teach your children so that they too do not forget”) than a field manual taking us into uncharted territory. But this does not bode well for my own thoughts about Melzer's book: if I am unable to approach his nonesoteric work in a straightforward manner, there is little chance of my being able to understand any of the works about which he so clearly writes.

In addition to everything else that it encompasses, *Philosophy Between the Lines* amounts to a justification of the work of Leo Strauss. Because the most sustained discussion of Strauss's career occurs in the final chapter (“Defending Reason: Esotericism and the Critique of Historicism”), it functions as the crescendo of the entire book. I am as little in need of conversion about Strauss's importance as a philosopher as I am about the existence of esotericism; it is, rather, the *frame* of the book that I believe has thrown me off. One way to write about Strauss is to show how he uses the history of philosophy as a lens or optic through which one might view the fundamental distinctions that occur in his thought (e.g., ancients/moderns, Jerusalem/Athens, philosopher/city, philosophy/poetry). Melzer has, in a sense, taken the opposite route—*Philosophy* takes Strauss's thought, in its rediscovery of

⁸ “But my purpose has not been to establish this interpretation as the demonstratively correct one. Let it be incorrect...I have simply sought to provide the reader with a concrete and reasonably plausible *illustration* of what sorts of things are meant by reading between the lines” (66–67).

esotericism, as the lens or optic through which to view the history of philosophy. Both approaches have benefits and drawbacks. For readers unfamiliar with Strauss and/or esotericism, Melzer's book will be illuminating. For readers desiring a rigorous and vigorous support of Strauss, his book will be unquestionably satisfying. There is no reason in the world why Melzer should also need to please readers who are both convinced about the existence of esotericism and view it ultimately as a transition point to other horizons. I am grateful that Melzer's work has held an intellectual mirror up to me and shown me my reflection.

In saying this I do not, for one minute, mean to diminish the important work that Melzer has accomplished in this book (or the original articles out of which this book developed). Its clarity cannot be overstated. That clarity can be viewed in the structure of the book, which adopts the tripartite structure of historical evidence (part 1), conceptual schematic (part 2), and consequences of his argument/research (part 3). Moreover, Melzer is at his best when he takes a seemingly basic issue and drops it on his unsuspecting audience like a bombshell (in the manner of a Zen *koan* or, perhaps, Jerry Seinfeld). When Melzer muses in chapter 6 ("Dangerous Truths: Protective Esotericism") that "there is no precise science of human irrationality, no accurate sociology of false beliefs" (199), the careful (yet unsuspecting) reader is led down a rabbit hole of problems both with respect to what such a science could even mean (is there a truth of error? can there be an organized, rational body of knowledge about the irrational?) and with respect to the humbling insight that perhaps the most prevalent aspect of life (irrationality) is not given over to study and mastery. Similarly (but no less disconcertingly), in chapter 9 ("A Beginner's Guide to Esoteric Reading"), Melzer attempts to (re-)originate the experience of esoteric reading for his readers by comparing it to a "Dear John" break-up letter. Just as the reader of such a letter would hang over every word, run the gamut of contextualizing procedures in order to figure out just what the author intended (e.g., "'Dearest John.' You know that she always uses 'dearest' in letters to you, so the word here means nothing in particular; but her 'with love' ending is the weakest of the three variations that she typically uses" [291]), one approaches a philosophical text with the same *eros*, the same dedication, and the same longing to understand and not be left behind. That we may be in the position of jilted lovers with respect to great texts of the past amounts to a sobering suggestion both as to our abilities as interlocutors and as to whether we were even the intended addressee. These are the thoughts that leave us awake nights. They are also the thoughts that presumably draw us to learn from *Philosophy Between the Lines*.

II. MELZER'S PROJECT

Chapters 1–4 (“The Testimonial Evidence for Esotericism,” “Interlude: Two Brief Examples,” “The Theoretical Basis of Philosophical Esotericism: The ‘Problem of Theory and Praxis,’” and “Objections, Resistance and Blindness to Esotericism”), comprising the “General Evidence” part of the book, all serve to make the case for the mere existence of esotericism as a past practice of writing and reading. Strange as it may seem to those of us already convinced, Melzer’s modern intellectual not only denies the existence of esotericism, but does so explicitly against even the more recent historical testimony to the contrary: “With perfect explicitness, all these early modern writers—spanning three countries and one hundred fifty years—attribute esotericism to virtually *all* ancient philosophers and philosophic poets and seem to regard this fact as well-known” (14). This means that our forgetting of esotericism is also a denial of written evidence *about* esotericism. The solution to this problem, Melzer contends, is disarmingly simple: “I would suggest that if readers are simply *aware* of esotericism as a historically common practice, they will be open to noticing what otherwise they will unfailingly overlook” (59). This awareness, however, comes at a price; it entails a dispassionate recognition of the limits of rationality: “I...argue that philosophical esotericism in all its forms ultimately grows out of a single, enduring problem of the human condition: the fact that we are not pure minds, the essential *dualism* of ‘theory’ and ‘praxis,’ of reason and its nonrational preconditions. In its philosophical use, the technique of esotericism—which is *dualistic* in its effort to send two messages at once—is an outgrowth of the essential dualism of human life” (70). Differently stated, if philosophy emerges in the city, it always already must contend with the opinions, passions, and actions of the nonphilosophical majority. The horizon in which reason comes to be is not, itself, rational. Seeing that philosophy has a limited capacity to express itself intelligibly in the public realm, it must choose carefully whom to speak to and how to do it.

The philosopher is thus isolated in a double sense: (1) in being able to distinguish truth from illusion/deception/opinion, and (2) in not being able to openly proclaim this discovery:

The philosopher is the person who, through a long dialectical journey, has come to see through the illusory goods for which others live and die. Freed from illusion—and from the distortion of experience that illusion produces—he is able, for the first time, to know himself, to be himself, and to fully experience his deepest longing, which is to comprehend the necessities that structure the universe and human life as part of that universe. This is the famous *vita contemplativa*, an ideal

of life found, in one form or another, among virtually all classical and medieval thinkers and still powerful among many modern thinkers as well. (71)

In “secur[ing] the practical interests of the theoretical life—the safety and the propagation of philosophy—in the face of the natural hostility of the nonphilosophical community” through the practice of writing between the lines, philosophers engage in “philosophical politics” (88). They are (as it were) advocates for the Good who acknowledge that the reality of life only allows for the Better and Worse: “Philosophical esotericism is a ‘doublespeak’ elicited by the doubleness of life itself” (92).

Chapters 5–8 (“Fear of Persecution: Defensive Esotericism,” “Dangerous Truths: Protective Esotericism,” “The Educational Benefits of Obscurity: Pedagogical Esotericism,” and “Rationalizing the World: Political Esotericism”) comprise the central part of the book (“Four Forms of Esotericism”). Here, Melzer provides his readers with in-depth accounts of the different types of (which is to say, reasons/necessities for) esotericism. It is fitting that Melzer’s discussion begin with defensive esotericism, since everything he has said up to this point leads to the belief that fear of persecution is the primary cause of writing between the lines; it surely is “the most readily understandable” form of esotericism (127). To emphasize his point, Melzer makes an audacious claim (that is at once satisfying for the philosophically minded and itself worthy of an exoteric formulation): “In the long, turbulent course of history, chance has made one group, now another, into a persecuted minority—Christians, Jews, African Americans, kulaks, Gypsies, Kurds. But there has been one relative constant, with deep roots, it would seem, in the nature of things: the persecution of philosophers. To be sure, no one would argue that philosophers’ sufferings have been the most severe: they are nothing as compared with those of slavery or the Holocaust. But they have arguably been the most constant. In the roughly two-thousand-year record of Western philosophy prior to, say, 1800, it is difficult to name a single major thinker who did not, at some point in his life, experience persecution or at least witness it close at hand” (138). The year 1800 is not a completely arbitrary one, for Melzer, insofar as the premise of the Enlightenment was “to construct a radically new kind of society, one based on reason, in which the tension between society and philosophy would be permanently overcome and, with it, the deepest cause of persecution” (159).

To think, however, that the Enlightenment served simply as a way to offset or discourage persecution of philosophy would be to already adopt

a post-1800 perspective on esotericism. In this respect, Melzer's discussion of protective esotericism serves as a corrective. For Melzer, protective esotericism "raises the profoundest issues and the profoundest resistance" (161) because it forces us to face the aforementioned sobering reality about the dualistic character of life: we naturally love our opinions and feel acutely threatened when our deepest beliefs are challenged—let alone proved insufficient. This is as true on the societal level as it is on the individual, and Melzer is, thus, certainly not wrong in holding that "the truth can be harmful or dangerous" (163). From the standpoint of protective esotericism, truth is not dangerous to the philosopher, but rather to the nonphilosopher. Melzer expresses one such truth under the heading "the tragic flaw of political life": "Whereas the lowest goods of life—food, shelter, clothing, safety—are self-evident to all, the higher goods, precisely in the degree to which they are more elevated and more important to us, are less clear and less available to general understanding. And this fact makes the higher things not only elusive but positively dangerous. For, given this obscurity, the discussion and pursuit of all the loftier goods are inherently prone to sectarian conflict, fanaticism, and obscurantism, as well as to skepticism, hypocrisy, and corruption" (170–71). While we may argue about the correct *ways in which* the lowest goods should become available, there is little disagreement about their need. If, on the other hand, one tells one's children or students that they ought to be listening to Beethoven or John Coltrane and not Blink-182, or that they ought to be reading Mark Twain and not playing Minecraft, one gets a sense of the general problems Melzer is here addressing. Perhaps the best one can do is to let them have their fun?

But who, in their right mind, would take such a dispassionate approach towards those about whom we care? It is due to the philosopher's love of her children that she adopts the third of Melzer's categories: pedagogical esotericism—that "most genuinely philosophical" form (205). While it may not be the case that the higher goods of philosophical insight are available to everyone (or even most), by the same turn, they are not a priori closed off from everyone, either. The question of the possibility of philosophy is thus, first and foremost, a question of the possibility of education. Strikingly, esotericism (in its pedagogical form) maintains that too easy access to philosophical insight can harm individuals' abilities to enact that philosophical insight for themselves. For this reason, "the solution...will involve some...effort to give away less and to make the reader work more for what he or she is getting" (211). Interestingly enough, it is the reliance on books that proves to be the culprit against which pedagogical esotericism must respond: "The...danger

of reading books is that it allows you to skip too many stages, shortcutting the proper intellectual development. Especially harmful is that it prevents the humble confrontation with your own ignorance. Reading makes you prematurely wise. Before you have had a chance to face the questions and live with them a while, you have seen the answers” (211). Paradoxically, reading renders people passive (213) and entitled. In this way, the very creation of the printing press historically contributed to the propagation of the same *hubris* that led the Athenians to put Socrates to death. What, then, is the proper relation between author and reader? How might one stem the tide of intellectual sluggishness and consumerism? Melzer responds by maintaining that any book attempting to counteract these vices takes seriously the following problem: “Wisdom cannot be told. The central paradox of philosophical pedagogy...is: how can one transmit from the outside what can only grow from within? Is there something that one person can do for a person that will somehow make him do everything for himself?” (216). Melzer’s answer amounts to a written-form of the Socratic method: “[1] do not give away the answers...[2] stimulate the student to think for himself—while subtly guiding that thinking—by making artful use of questions, hints, and puzzles of the right kind...[3] take [one’s] start from where the student is, from what he believes right now, and proceed through an internal critique...[and 4] proceed in *stages*” (216–17; numbering added). If premodern philosophical texts strike us as foreign, it is because they precisely do *not* take their bearings from models of research characteristic of current academic discourse. Instead, they contain (as it were) a living inscription of the process of teaching, learning, and discovery.

The change away from esotericism in modernity, Melzer contends, was as gradual as it was radical. The fourth, peculiarly modern, form of esotericism—“political esotericism”—arose initially as a way to further the creation of a rational society via the reconciling of theory and praxis:

Ironically, this very project to create a rational society and, cor-
relatively, an end to all social hostility toward and censorship of
philosophy required at first a rigorous new esotericism—one that,
in general, would aid philosophical writings in their new quest to
become instruments of political power and, more specifically, would
help them manage, in a safe and prudent manner, the gradual subver-
sion of traditional society and its replacement with a philosophically
grounded politics. Thus arose...“political esotericism,” which may be
defined as esotericism in the service of the newly political goal of phi-
losophy: to actualize the potential harmony of reason and social life
through the progressive rationalization of the political world. (236)

It is this modern—and, paradoxically, Enlightenment-oriented—esotericism that sought to intervene in practical politics. This, for Melzer, is in keeping with the change of orientation away from the autonomy of the contemplative life toward the reinstatement of theory in the service of practice. If the purpose of premodern esotericism was to write for the philosophical few, the purpose of modern esotericism was to communicate with the many “for the purpose of enlightening and transforming the political and religious world” (237). This form of esotericism remained a widespread and acknowledged phenomenon in the eighteenth century (276). What happened? The very practice of esotericism came into conflict with Enlightenment ideals. If the project is universal education based on reason, the practice of secrecy towards the irrational many can at best be viewed as a necessary evil. As a result, “in many thinkers of this period, one detects an ambivalence bordering on distaste toward their own esoteric practice. This ambivalence is no accident, but results from the fact that political esotericism is in inherent tension with itself...a lie designed to end all lying” (281). The ideal of openness of the Enlightenment went along with increased vitriol towards any practice of secrecy; this, in turn, gave rise to “a hostility to political esotericism itself for embracing dissimulation and self-censorship for the sake of truthfulness and free speech” (283). Ultimately, the ideals of truthfulness, freedom of speech, universal education, and rationality became so prevalent that they were simply taken for granted. What started out as a critique of prejudice and superstition, on Melzer’s account, became the dominant prejudice and superstition. This had the retroactive effect of obscuring the reasons for premodern esotericism and, therefore, led to the forgetting of its very existence: “The slow march of progress—the improvement of the world through the public dissemination of truth—slowly buried the [prior] conflictual perspective, until people forgot that it had ever been there. It came to seem that classical rationalism was always nothing but a nascent form of eighteenth-century rationalism—harmonist, enlightening, and progressive. The Enlightenment image of the philosopher—the public-spirited rationalist bringing light to the world—came to seem the only one” (284). Expressed in historical terms, the point can be stated as follows: premodernity made possible the beginnings of modernity; later modernity forgot this beginning and, in so doing, forgot what those beginnings were responding to. This amounts to a double occlusion: the initial rejection of premodernity (which, insofar as it happened between the lines, amounts to an obscuration) and the subsequent forgetting of that rejection.

Chapters 9–10 (“A Beginner’s Guide to Esoteric Reading” and “Defending Reason: Esotericism and the Critique of Historicism”), comprising the final section of the book (“The Consequences of the Recovery of Esotericism”), deal respectively with learning the practice of esoteric reading and the place of esotericism in Strauss’s critique of historicism. The former chapter is, in large (but not exclusive) measure, a close ministerial presentation of Strauss’s essay “Persecution and the Art of Writing.” I will, therefore, forgo an extended discussion of it except to say that I found (1) his beginner’s bibliography of esoteric interpretation (322–24) to be helpful and (2) his suggestion that we ought to understand Strauss’s construal of the “omniscient author” in the manner of a “useful heuristic device” (296) to be a genuine contribution toward the removal of a stumbling block. What is remarkable about chapter 10 is that (much in the manner of a text such as the preface to Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*) it functions as both the first and the last word of the entire book. As I mentioned earlier, Strauss’s rediscovery of reading and writing “between the lines” is the (initial) lens through which the history of philosophy is viewed (i.e., in its esoteric dimension). But insofar as this lens exists as it was rediscovered by Strauss, Melzer’s book finds its natural conclusion in a discussion of how such a rediscovery operates in Strauss’s own thought. In this way—paraphrasing the language of Strauss’s one-time teacher Martin Heidegger—Melzer’s book exhibits an evident relation between its beginning and its end.⁹

What, on Melzer’s account, is the center of Strauss’s philosophical project? It is “first to uncover the fundamental gulf between ancient and modern rationalism and, then, to demonstrate that, unlike the latter, the former—which is nonhistoricist thought at its peak—was genuinely self-knowing and able to give an adequate justification of itself. Both parts of this project rely decisively on the rediscovery of esotericism” (349). Whereas the (public) self-understanding of modern rationalism remains subject to the arational (not to say “irrational”) movement of history, premodern rationalism could give an adequate justification of itself (as esoteric) precisely insofar as it understood itself as persecuted by the nonphilosophical majority. Differently stated, premodern rationalism understands the distinction between the theoretical or contemplative life of the philosopher, on one hand, and the practical life in the city, on the other. There is no conflict between philosophical esotericism and public speech because there is no presumed harmony of theory and praxis.

⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, rev. Dennis Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 7.

This situation becomes exactly reversed in the historicist thought of modernity (354). But if modern thought is saddled to a historicist reduction, how was Strauss able to find a vantage point from which to step outside it? Melzer describes Strauss's "history of historicism" (358), which began as a critique of religion, developed into the Enlightenment ideal of bettering humans' estate (356), and emerged into an "unleashing of theoretical reason on the world of practice" which "led to dangerous universalism, political doctrinairism, and ideological imperialism" (357) that were subject to the whim of historical fashion. The "irony of history" (to use Reinhold Niebuhr's off-quoted phrase) is that what appears rational at one point can transform into its opposite at another: "The more that philosophic rationalism, liberated by the Enlightenment, moved aggressively into the open, the more it posed dangers to healthy moral and political life and thus the more it generated a hostility toward reason. This [ultimately] led to...the rise of *philosophic antirationalism*" (357). By the middle of the twentieth century, thinkers began to eschew any conception of the good life—even those construed through the crossroads of reason and history. Eschewing reason altogether, radical historicism had, at last, reached its philosophical apex in relativism. The ideology of progress, therefore, led to its own philosophical downfall.

For Melzer (and Strauss), our ability to see this trajectory stems from the fact that historicism "is true of modern thought" (359) but not its premodern alternative. In other words, the philosophical apex of modern thought is only "relatively" true. Strauss's insight that modern thought is true relative to its own time period amounts to a turning of historicism on its head. This historicizing of historicism (i.e., this contextualizing of modern thought) opened the space to consider the alternative, which Melzer does: "We have seen that the methodology of progress tends to historicize philosophical thinking by putting a thinker out of touch with his foundations or presuppositions. But the practice of esotericism—considering it now in its *pedagogical* meaning and use—is designed to have the precise opposite effect: when successful, it permits, indeed forces, a thinker to examine and fully appropriate his foundations" (362). This says nothing other than that the original purpose of philosophy is to "see clearly" (362), and only by means of that original purpose can one freely take up the challenge of living out one's foundations in self-awareness. Two conditions, however, need to be met in order that philosophy as a way of life can occur: (1) that potential philosophers learn how to actively philosophize, and (2) that nonphilosophers not hinder, or feel hindered by, philosophy. For Melzer, as for Strauss, both conditions depend upon the practice of esotericism.

III. SPEAKING OF HEIDEGGER...

That Melzer is aware of Strauss's complex debt to Heidegger, there is little doubt: "Strauss's acknowledged debt to Heidegger means...[that] Strauss sees his own path of thought as not simply *sui generis* but representing the self-overcoming of historicism" (344). There are moments, however, where Melzer discreetly cautions against any simplistic association of the two: "Strauss seems [in "An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism"] to follow Heidegger in maintaining that 'to be means to be elusive or to be a mystery'" (399n55). One might surmise that this merely *apparent* similarity has something to do with Heidegger's "religious murmurings" (329) that Strauss sought to overcome in his history of historicism. Melzer does not say; therefore, we do not know for sure. I am struck, however, by the deeply Heideggerian resonances that frame and run throughout Melzer's entire narrative. Since I do not believe Melzer to be secretly advocating for Heidegger (or anything, for that matter), my point here is not about his intention. Conversely, I do not believe that indicating these resonances violates the "heuristic omniscient author" directive of Melzer and Strauss. I do find these resonances too audible to ignore and will, therefore, draw attention to them.

Melzer notes (near the beginning of his preface) that "countless books have been written celebrating the discovery of some important phenomenon. The present work examines the forgetting of one" (xi). This claim is certainly true, yet there is (prior to Melzer's own work) one notable book which explicitly raises the theme of forgetting—*Being and Time*: "This question [i.e., the question of being] has today been forgotten" (*Being and Time*, 1). It is not simply that Melzer's text follows Heidegger in opening its inquiry with this theme; forgetting (specifically, the forgetting of esotericism) is, in fact, the explicit thread that holds Melzer's narrative together—this in both its questioning as well as its assertive stances: "If a long and now-forgotten tradition of philosophical esotericism really did exist in the West, how could we ever prove that? How could we even know it?" (11); "over the last two centuries, the forgetfulness of esotericism has led modern readers to identify the true thought of past writers with the merely exoteric and conventional surface of their writings" (355). This forgetting of the question of esotericism is, for Melzer and Strauss, coeval with the forgetting of the foundations upon which modern thought arose: "having...systematically cut itself off from its own roots and foundations, modern 'progress philosophy' eventually discovers to its surprise that it rests upon choices and presuppositions of which it has lost awareness" (366). Differently stated, the forgetting of esotericism goes

hand in hand with the forgetting of the premodern alternative to modern philosophy—that is, the forgetting that premodern thought *is an alternative*. If premodern thought is an alternative to modern “progress philosophy” and historicism, it renders the latter questionable. If that alternative is occluded, however, the questionability itself is hidden as well. Again, this mirrors the structure of the problem Heidegger announces in Introduction 1 of *Being and Time*: “not only is the *answer* to the question of being lacking, but even the question itself is obscure and without direction. Thus to retrieve the question of being means first of all to work out adequately the *formulation* of the question” (*Being and Time*, 3). Heidegger’s procedure is mirrored in Melzer’s retrieval and formulation of the question of esotericism as an alternative to modern philosophy.

Melzer is quite open and passionate about the dangers of “extreme openness and freedom of speech” (201) for modern society:

When people grow up in an environment where everything is openly disputed and questioned, with shocking and contrarian opinions on constant display, a common result is that they eventually throw up their hands in despair and adopt a “who’s to say” posture toward all fundamental questions. ...It is not that people today have no real or heartfelt beliefs, but under the pressure of an environment of great skepticism and dispute, they shelter these beliefs by pushing them underground. ...Thus, a gulf has opened up between what we think and what, deep down, we really believe. Our true beliefs have become increasingly unreachable, while our thinking has become increasingly insincere. As many observers of our condition have maintained, ours is the great “age of inauthenticity.” We no longer reason with our whole souls. We don’t connect. (202)

While many indeed have analyzed the problem of inauthenticity, few have done so—within the context of communication—as powerfully as Heidegger in his exposition of “idle talk”: “this discoursing...communicates by *gossiping* and *passing the word along*...a process by which its initial lack of grounds to stand on increases to complete groundlessness. And this is not limited to vocal gossip, but spreads to what is written, as ‘scribbling’” (*Being and Time*, 163). If Melzer (following Strauss) counters inauthentic discourse with esotericism (203), this follows Heidegger’s analogous countering of the former with “reticence” and “silence”: “Authentic silence is possible only in genuine discourse. In order to be silent, Dasein¹⁰ must have something to say, that is,

¹⁰ In German, “existence.” Heidegger uses it to refer to human beings in a manner that breaks with the classical construal of human being as “rational animal.”

must be in command of an authentic and rich disclosedness of itself. Then reticence makes manifest and puts down ‘idle talk.’ As a mode of discourse, reticence articulates the intelligibility of Dasein so primordially that it gives rise to a genuine possibility for hearing and to a being-with-one-another that is transparent” (*Being and Time*, 159).

In order to bring potential philosophers back to the point at which they are no longer unwittingly beholden to historicism, Melzer’s Strauss undertakes a “self-overcoming of historicism.” The Nietzschean phrase “self-overcoming” indicates that this interruption occurs from within the very “space” or context that is to be interrupted. Strauss accomplishes this by going back through the history of philosophy, to its origins in ancient Greece, in order to reoriginate or reactivate the fundamental experience of philosophy as a way of life. As Richard Velkley has argued,¹¹ this is precisely what Heidegger refers to as “the destruction of the history of ontology.” Melzer is surely correct in stating that Strauss ultimately finds classical rationalism to “escape the central Heideggerian charge that it dogmatically identifies ‘being’ with ‘intelligible’ or ‘object’” (351–52). Be that as it may, the procedure Strauss undertakes—and the reasons why he undertakes it—are given powerful articulation in Heidegger’s oft-quoted passage about “traditionality”: “The tradition that hereby gains dominance makes what it ‘transmits’ so little accessible that initially and for the most part it covers it over instead. What has been handed down is handed over to obviousness; it bars access to those original ‘wellsprings’ out of which the traditional categories and concepts were in part genuinely drawn. The tradition even makes us forget such a provenance altogether. Indeed, it makes us wholly incapable of even understanding that such a return is necessary” (*Being and Time*, 20–21). In Melzer’s words, this return is necessary “because philosophy has a natural tendency to decay over time—to turn into a tradition, to ‘historicize’—because people tend to accept too passively and unquestioningly the conclusions of the great philosophers of the past. This tendency is deadly to genuine philosophy, which requires that one always think everything through from the beginning and for oneself” (362). The self-activation characteristic of philosophy requires a return to the origins in order to free oneself from the dependence of tradition. In Heidegger’s terms, “The resoluteness in which Dasein comes back to itself discloses the actual factual possibilities of authentic existing *in terms of the heritage* which that resoluteness takes over as thrown. Resolute coming back to thrownness

¹¹ Richard L. Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy: On Original Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 27–79.

involves *handing oneself over* to traditional possibilities, although not necessarily *as* traditional ones” (*Being and Time*, 365). It might be argued that the formulation “handing oneself over” indicates a historical determinism (or, in any case, a fatalism) that Melzer fundamentally wants to oppose. However, Heidegger’s point is simply this: our freedom resides in the awareness of our philosophical origin and in the possibilities that reexperiencing that origin allow us. This is, to my mind, precisely the insight that Melzer (and Strauss) have in mind in returning to premodern esotericism. Thus, “handing oneself over” to traditional possibilities in a nontraditional way is what Melzer terms “thinking for oneself” (215). The truths that one finds in this self-activation are not “the expression of historical actuality because such truths could not be embodied in any historical actuality” (354). Differently stated: “Higher than actuality stands possibility” (*Being and Time*, 36). Moreover, one does not need to know the German *Sorge*, *Zukunft*, and *Schicksal* to hear the Heideggerian resonances in Melzer’s claim that this self-activation amounts to a “think[ing] form out of one’s own *care*, *future* and *fate*” (215; my emphasis).

If I am dangerously close to suggesting that Melzer has given us a Heideggerian Strauss, this is neither a criticism nor an insight about Strauss that Strauss himself could plausibly deny. Paradoxically, the commentators who read Melzer’s book solely as a rescue of Strauss from the charges of political influence may have to deal with a Strauss connected with another thinker who faced analogous charges (in my own view, more serious and substantial). For philosophical readers, however, this ought not be troubling for the very reason that Melzer has just stated: thought is not simply reducible to any actual historical circumstance. Possibilities lie unexplored because “hiddenness is a property of being itself. Nature is esoteric. ...A rhetoric of concealment would be most useful, perhaps even necessary, to disclose reality as it is in its hiddenness” (234). Showing his readers both (1) how Strauss went about pursuing the project of thinking for oneself and (2) how readers might take up this project for themselves is the supreme merit of Melzer’s work.

Jeffrey Bernstein, *Leo Strauss: On the Borders of Judaism, Philosophy, and History*. SUNY Series in the Thought and Legacy of Leo Strauss. New York: State University of New York Press, 2015, 228 pp., \$85 (hardcover).

Leo Strauss on Maimonides: The Complete Writings. Edited and with an introduction by Kenneth Hart Green. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013, 696 pp., \$48 (hardcover).

Kenneth Hart Green, *Leo Strauss and the Rediscovery of Maimonides*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013, 207 pp., \$36 (hardcover).

STEVEN FRANKEL

XAVIER UNIVERSITY

frankel@xavier.edu

Several years ago in *Interpretation*, an amicable but fierce debate played out between Werner Dannhauser and Hilail Gildin over the alleged atheism of Leo Strauss: Dannhauser leveled the charge of atheism, which he claimed that Strauss concealed, or at least muted, out of “his reverence for Judaism.”¹ The evidence against Strauss is that he was a philosopher and that all philosophers are atheists.² At the risk of some inconsistency, Dannhauser asked readers

¹ See Hilail Gildin, “Deja Jew All Over Again: Dannhauser on Leo Strauss and Atheism,” *Interpretation* 25, no. 1 (1997): 125–33. Gildin was responding to an essay by Dannhauser, “Athens and Jerusalem or Jerusalem and Athens,” in *Leo Strauss and Judaism: Jerusalem and Athens Critically Revisited*, ed. David Novak (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 155–71.

² Strauss was publicly accused of atheism in *Commentary* magazine in 1959. His reply, which was never sent, was circulated among his students and later published by Kenneth Hart Green. Like Socrates, Strauss does not directly refute the charge of atheism; instead, he raises the question of the meaning of the charge: “My accuser has not even tried to prove his accusation. If he should be induced by this remark to try to prove his accusation, I warn him in advance to keep in mind the difference between revealed theology and natural theology or to make himself familiar with it.” See Green, *Jew and Philosopher: The Return to Maimonides in the Jewish Thought of Leo Strauss* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 238.

for leniency on the grounds that Strauss encouraged his students to take revelation more seriously and that as a result, many (including Dannhauser) left Strauss's classroom with a greater appreciation for the Bible. But why would a philosopher encourage his students to believe revelation?

Charging philosophers with impiety and atheism is as old as philosophy itself; however, the meaning of impiety changed dramatically in modernity as exemplified by the life and work of Spinoza. Here, I refer not to the fact that Spinoza himself was accused (and convicted) of not believing in the God of the Bible, a charge for which there is compelling evidence. Rather, I mean the modern version of the charge that Spinoza leveled against Maimonides and medieval philosophy. Spinoza may have been the first philosopher to use freely the accusation of impiety to defame others. In chapter 7 of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, Spinoza takes particular aim at Maimonides. He reports that Maimonides "supposes that the Prophets agreed among themselves in all things and were the highest caliber Philosophers."³ To prove this, according to Spinoza, Maimonides developed a simple hermeneutical trick, namely, wherever the literal sense of scripture appears to contradict reason, the interpreter should abandon the literal meaning in favor of a symbolic interpretation.⁴ Maimonides realized, according to Spinoza, that the nonrational multitude would never willingly submit to the authority of philosophy, so he devised this hermeneutical strategy to conceal philosophy and present it as theology. Maimonides's real motive was not piety, nor even the preservation of philosophy; rather, he was interested in power. He wished to create a "new kind of priest," who could establish the authoritative reading of scripture. Maimonides's strategy was soon adopted by other unscrupulous and ambitious men who turned the interpretation of scripture into a violent sectarian affair. Spinoza reports that in his day, "the love of propagating divine religion [had] degenerated into sordid greed and ambition, and likewise the temple itself into a theater where...orators were heard, none of whom was bound by a desire for teaching the populace but for carrying them off in admiration for himself."⁵

Strauss's verdict on the "case against Spinoza" concedes that Spinoza's critique of scripture, including his attack on Maimonides, is "amazingly

³ Benedict Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, trans. Martin D. Yaffe (Newburyport, MA: Focus, 2004), 99.

⁴ See *ibid.*, 97.

⁵ *Ibid.*, preface, xix.

unscrupulous.⁶ By this he means that Spinoza uses scripture to undermine the belief in scripture by refuting the Maimonidean claim that it contains theoretical wisdom. But why did Spinoza attack Judaism and Maimonides so ferociously? Spinoza's broader strategy was to separate completely philosophy and religion, and build a society that allows for freedom in both realms. Forcing scripture to abandon its claims to theoretical truth was the price for that society, which Spinoza gladly paid in the hope that freedom would create more stable and tolerant communities: "the humanitarian end seems to justify every means: he plays a most dangerous game; his procedure is as much beyond good and evil as his God."⁷ By undermining scripture and promoting freedom, Spinoza may have unwittingly undermined the foundations of justice.

The success of Spinoza's project can be attributed in large part to the stilted account he presents of Athens and Jerusalem: if Athens represents the universally true and demonstrable account of the whole and Jerusalem stands for a partial, superstitious account based on a particular (and therefore disputed) revelation, it is hardly surprising for Spinoza that reason or science prevails. With the victory of philosophy, a scholarly consensus emerged on Maimonidean political theology as a relic of the past, a misguided attempt to harmonize philosophy and religion so that philosophy had the upper hand. By the time Strauss wrote his first book on Spinoza's critique of religion, few scholars—with the notable exception of Hermann Cohen—took Maimonides seriously as an alternative to Spinoza's account of the theological-political problem. To understand Strauss's thought, Kenneth Hart Green and Jeffrey Bernstein have written detailed accounts of how Strauss managed to recover Maimonides's teaching and reinvigorate the debate between Athens and Jerusalem.

According to Kenneth Green, Strauss's Herculean effort to recover Maimonides is among the greatest scholarly achievements of the twentieth century. He estimates that the recovery of Maimonides is "one of four great scholarly rediscoveries of the 20th century in Jewish Studies, on par with [Strauss's] friend Gershom Scholem's recovery and presentation of Kabbalah, with the rescue, retrieval, and editing of the treasure trove of medieval materials stored in the Genizah of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo, and with the accidental uncovering...of the ancient Dead Sea Scrolls of the Second Temple-era Judea" (*Complete Writings*, xviii). Green's scholarship has certainly

⁶ Leo Strauss, "Preface to *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*," in *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity*, ed. Kenneth Hart Green (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 159. Henceforth *JPCM*.

⁷ Strauss, *JPCM*, 161.

helped to establish Strauss's place in Jewish studies, but his latest books have achieved something else: by collecting Strauss's most important writings on Maimonides, Green has made it possible for students to follow the development of Strauss's thought and evaluate each of his discoveries.

Green is well positioned for this project, having spent his career developing a rich alternative to Spinoza's account of the relation between Athens and Jerusalem by examining Strauss's thought. Green's first book, *Jew and Philosopher: The Return to Maimonides in the Jewish Thought of Leo Strauss*, presents Strauss as a "cognitive theist" rather than an atheist.⁸ This designation preserves Strauss's openness to the truth of revelation which Spinoza had attempted to foreclose in the name of reason. According to Green, Strauss learned from Lessing that Spinoza's rationalism had become dogmatic and as such became the very sort of authority that philosophy rebels against. To restore the ancient, truer meaning of philosophy, Lessing advised the use of revelation against the dogmatism of the Enlightenment. Green shows how Strauss, following this strategy, was able to remain loyal to Judaism and pursue philosophy. With the addition of these two volumes, *Leo Strauss and the Rediscovery of Maimonides* and *Leo Strauss on Maimonides: The Complete Writings*, Green further demonstrates how Strauss learned from Maimonides a strategy for remaining loyal to both cities without compromising the claims of either. In other words, Maimonides presented Strauss with a compelling alternative to Spinoza's account of the relation between Jerusalem and Athens. Strauss's recovery of Maimonides, in Green's presentation, allows simultaneously the recovery of ancient philosophy and the restoration of revelation.

In *Leo Strauss on Maimonides: The Complete Writings*, Green has collected Strauss's sixteen major essays and lectures on Maimonides, some of which have never before appeared in English. As Green admits, however, the title of the collection is somewhat misleading since "the aspiration to completeness could not be achieved perfectly" (xv). This is because Strauss made so many references to Maimonides and medieval philosophy throughout his career that any attempt to gather all of them would require several additional volumes. Instead, Green has collected the pieces that illustrate Strauss's gradual rediscovery of Maimonides as a thinker of the highest caliber, who surpassed in depth and audacity not only Strauss's contemporaries but also Spinoza.

To appreciate the value of Green's collection, consider Strauss's essay "How to Begin to Study *The Guide of the Perplexed*." It appeared in 1963 as the introductory essay to the monumental English translation of the *Guide*

⁸ Green, *Jew and Philosopher*, 26–27, 167n27, 237n1, 239n2.

by Shlomo Pines. Naturally, most newcomers to Maimonides and Strauss would see fit to begin their study with this essay. For one thing, it represents Strauss's most extensive and complete account of how to approach the *Guide*. Strauss seems to suggest as much and begins the essay by presenting a detailed outline of the work: "I believe that it will not be amiss if I simply present the plan of the *Guide* as it has become clear to me in the course of about twenty-five years of frequently interrupted but never abandoned study" (493). Strauss's title should not be misconstrued. The essay is hardly intended for novices who are just beginning their study of medieval philosophy. Strauss's study presumes, like the *Guide* itself, years of prerequisite study and demonstrates how careful students of the *Guide* speak publicly about the text. (Strauss appears to present his findings in an esoteric style: the surface of the essay looks chaotic but is undergirded by a hidden structure.) Strauss's essay is so complex—Green describes it as "the most impressive effort ever made to map the plan and structure of Maimonides' great book"—that Green does not even attempt to summarize it (63). Rather, he offers twelve clusters of questions or perplexities for the reader to ponder.

If Strauss's essay represents the peak of his lifelong study of Maimonides, Green's collection helps us approach this summit gradually. Strauss's essays are arranged chronologically so that the reader can see how he managed, step by step, to recover Maimonides's thought. In addition, Green has chosen several pieces that Strauss himself did not choose to publish during his lifetime but which show the difficulties that he encountered and how he managed to overcome them. Among the earliest pieces, Green includes unfinished notes from a lecture in Berlin on Hermann Cohen and Maimonides. One reason Strauss did not finish these notes is that he was still struggling to understand how to read Maimonides. In sharp contrast, the collection also includes Strauss's masterful lecture nearly thirty years later in Chicago, modestly entitled "Introduction to Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*." Here we see Strauss in total control of the content and the presentation. In less than thirty years, Strauss learned to read the *Guide* and, as Green observes, "overturn several centuries of entrenched conventional scholarly wisdom" in the process (xix).

Green explains in detail the obstacles with which Strauss contended: scholars tended to view Maimonides as a thinker who prepared the way for subsequent thinkers, who presumably surpassed him. From their point of view, one may admire Maimonides's contributions to intellectual progress, yet also admit that the same progress has rendered his thought obsolete. One way that modern thought has surpassed Maimonides is by separating reason

from revelation, a prerequisite for clearing out superstition and promoting scientific and moral progress. Our freedom, particularly from superstitions such as the belief in revelation, is one hallmark of our progress. The alternative to this view was virtually lost until Strauss entertained the possibility that medieval and ancient philosophy achieved a “natural perspective...[an] enduring perception of human things as they present themselves in their unchanged, essential manifestation” (23).

Nor did Strauss dodge the most compelling parts of Spinoza’s critique, such as his account of the prophets as individuals who could rely only on their imaginations because of their severely limited knowledge of nature. In his 1935 essay “Maimonides’ Doctrine of Prophecy and Its Sources,” Strauss coins the term “prophetology” to describe the Maimonidean approach to divine law, which resembles the Platonic approach to political science whereby prophecy is viewed as a branch of it. Whereas Spinoza insists that reason and imagination cannot be combined in a single human being, Maimonides argues that the best lawgiver combines both and is the most perfect human being. The prophet, like the Platonic philosopher king, is the most perfect individual and as such most qualified to establish the best society. The divine law combines religion and politics to order society in the most rational way. Nor could the best society be ordered in any other way since rationality has limited authority among the nonrational individuals who are always the majority.

To describe the divine law as the best law means that its rationality is balanced by its ability to appeal imaginatively to nonrational individuals. This is what Green describes as a “unique balance” between reason and revelation; the tension between them is managed in such a way as to maintain the integrity of both (26). Maimonides “first accepts and obeys the Law,” by whose authority he finds justification for a “life devoted to reason” (27). In *Philosophy and Law* (1935), Strauss argues that modern political thought had discredited this delicate balance such that the only compelling alternatives appear to be “orthodoxy or atheism.” Neither alternative appealed to Strauss; instead he sought to rediscover another possibility that could be embraced “by rational people...and not merely as an extravagant gesture or act of will, bespeaking despair, muddle-headedness, distress, or loss of nerve” (30). Such a possibility entails an approach to scripture and Law that does not cut them off from reason.

Following the thought of Maimonides led Strauss to another unexpected discovery. In contrast to the scholarly consensus that insisted on seeing Maimonides as a disciple of Aristotle, Strauss discovered from Farabi that

Maimonides was instead closer to Plato: “Plato had already discovered the principles that were vital to advance the freedom of philosophic thinking in its theological-political context” (32). In “The Place of the Doctrine of Providence according to Maimonides” (1937), Strauss shows how Maimonides adapts the Platonic distinction between the few and the many to his interpretation of the Law. His dual teaching of providence includes a general sense of providence for those who follow the Law and contribute to the collective order, and particular providence for those who are intellectually excellent. Intellectual virtue remains preeminent, but it does not undermine moral virtue.

As Strauss became more attentive to the demands of Platonic philosophy, his care in reading Maimonides became even more rigorous. Reviewing a new translation of Maimonides’s *Mishneh Torah* in 1939, Strauss complains that the translator has not paid enough attention to the precision of the author in numbering paragraphs, translating key terms consistently, and in general assuming that Maimonides’s writing was anything but as “careful, precise, artful, deliberate, and thoughtful as it is possible for a human author to achieve” (43). Within two years, Strauss would publish his discovery, in “The Literary Character of the *Guide of the Perplexed*” (1941), that the literary style of the *Guide* was the key to unraveling its political teaching. Maimonides had openly admitted to choosing every word of the *Guide* deliberately and carefully. Even where he appeared to contradict himself, he had assured readers, this too was deliberate. The fact that the surface of the text appears disorganized or haphazard should not discourage us from observing the profound depths of the book. In other words, Maimonides’s esotericism is hidden in plain sight. Why then had it been so completely neglected by modern scholarship? The assumptions that inform that scholarship have an important source in Spinoza’s hermeneutics, particularly chapter 7 of the *Treatise*, which explains how to read the Bible. According to Spinoza, the chaotic surface of the biblical text does not conceal any profound depth. Rather, the surface is exactly what it appears to be, that is, a hastily compiled amalgam of sources: “faulty, truncated, adulterated, not consistent with itself, [and] we have only fragments of it.”⁹ Despite subsequent efforts to harmonize the text, there is little point in searching for wisdom beyond the surface. Modern scholars are trained to confirm that the Bible mostly reflects the cultural background and prejudices of its authors, as well as a simple teaching of *caritas*. Spinoza has trained us moderns to stop our interpretation at the literal surface of the text.

⁹ Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, 14.

Maimonides's account invites us to consider that, however rare it may be, wisdom is a permanent, trans-historical possibility, and that such wisdom is contained in revelation, including knowledge of the best human life and the best form of political organization. Nor is scripture naive about the threats to that life, particularly that posed by superstition. It offers the most powerful program ever conceived to limit superstitious ignorance and enlighten humanity. Another hallmark of the wisdom of scripture is its recognition of the limits of enlightenment and the permanent divide between the few and the many. According to Maimonides, this wisdom is embodied in a literary style that simultaneously addresses the different desires and needs of each group. The apparent chaos on the surface of the Bible is actually a brilliant strategy to address individuals of varying rationality. Such a style can be achieved only by the most perfect individuals, the prophets, who miraculously achieve perfection of the intellect and imagination—the very possibility that Spinoza denies at the beginning of the *Treatise*.

In addition, the literary style implies a profound concern for the well-being and the enlightenment of everyone, regardless of one's level of rationality. The lexicographic chapters at the beginning of the *Guide* indicate a basic level of knowledge that everyone is obliged to accept lest he transgress the law by committing idolatry. The public dimension of Maimonides's teaching gives way to the secret teachings of the Torah, but these secrets are concealed with extraordinary care (see Green's catalog of these means at *Complete Writings*, 47). Those who take care to penetrate the secret teaching are presumably obliged by their wisdom above all not to divulge things that may undermine the well-being of the others (or the stability of the society). The fact that teachings are allegedly hidden, and that those who discover them may not divulge their discoveries, leads to endless speculation about the true meaning of the Torah. Can we ever be certain that Maimonides means what he says? As in a Platonic dialogue, the literary style emphasizes questions and the quest for certainty—even more than answers. This helps explain why it is so difficult to get to the bottom of Maimonides's project, even with Strauss's analysis.

Strauss had misgivings about the choice between atheism and orthodoxy that he faced as “a young Jew born and raised in Germany.”¹⁰ Both choices demanded commitments that Strauss was unwilling to make. The atheism of his peers was based not on love of truth, but on a love of cruelty turned inward, that is, a willingness to suffer as a sign of rectitude. Such a commitment could have been justified if Spinoza had been successful in giving

¹⁰ Strauss, *JPCM*, 137.

a full and rational explanation of the whole. Since he was not, it was a mere act of faith not necessarily superior to religion. To make matters worse, this version of atheism was not moderated by reason, and tended to gravitate toward extreme political teachings. On the other hand, Spinoza's success in criticizing Maimonides appeared to render the choice for orthodoxy even less palatable, since it rested on belief in revelation that appeared to be no more than an irrational and fantastic dream. Strauss set out to restore both Jerusalem and Athens, as Green persuasively argues, with Maimonides as his guide.

This explains why, as we saw above, Strauss's students left his courses with renewed respect for both reason and revelation. But Green's account, while persuasive, also raises some troubling questions. The defense of Maimonides involves showing the possibility, contra Spinoza, that scripture contains theoretical wisdom. But apart from his posthumously published lecture "On the Interpretation of Genesis," Strauss makes relatively little effort to do so.¹¹ In addition, Green's collection reveals that Strauss did most of his work on Maimonides in the thirties. After 1941, there are relatively few studies devoted exclusively to Maimonides. There is, to be sure, the important effort Strauss made to have the *Guide* translated into English in 1963—an effort that leaves no doubt about his reverence for Maimonides. But Strauss's prodigious scholarly output is primarily devoted to Athens. One might wonder whether Strauss turned from Maimonides to Plato as a result of his "rediscovery" of Maimonides. Or, as Spinoza suggests, whether respect for Jerusalem merely conceals an attempt to establish the authority of Athens. Green insists otherwise:

Strauss expresses his conviction that, however much Maimonides made use of Greek philosophy, what he presents as his definitive teaching is affirmatively Jewish. This is not merely Greek philosophy with a Jewish veneer, but is an attempt to wrestle with the challenge of ancient Greek thought, and with what the best Greek thinkers taught about God, man, and the world in order to, if possible, make it consistent with Jewish teachings. (61)

Green's two volumes establish the importance of Strauss's rediscovery of Maimonides and, more generally, the need to study medieval rationalism in order to grasp the limits of modern rationalism. At the same time, and

¹¹ Leo Strauss, "On the Interpretation of Genesis," in *JPCM*, 359–76. Also see Leo Strauss, "Jerusalem and Athens: Some Preliminary Reflections," in *JPCM*, 377–405.

to Green's great credit, his collection and commentary do not suppress the central questions about the relation of Athens and Jerusalem.¹²

Indeed, Green has pursued theoretical alternatives openly and vigorously as the director of the SUNY Press series *The Thought and Legacy of Leo Strauss*, inviting a range of serious contributions from scholars of Strauss's thought. The most recent addition to this series is Jeffrey Bernstein's *Leo Strauss: On the Borders of Judaism, Philosophy, and History*. Like Green, Bernstein affirms the centrality of Maimonides for understanding Strauss (51, 162–63). He also argues that Maimonides made it possible for Strauss to recover both Jerusalem and Athens and this recovery makes him a most original and important critic of modern Jewish thought (see 34). In addition, Bernstein's account supplements and extends Green's analysis. For example, in an original and penetrating reading of *What Is Political Philosophy?*, Bernstein shows that Strauss deliberately avoided mentioning Maimonides during his lectures at the Hebrew University in 1953 in order not to upset his audience (130). This helps demonstrate that Maimonides plays a central role in grasping the meaning of Strauss's mature thought, even when he is hidden from view (127).

But Bernstein's account of Maimonides and his relation to Spinoza diverges from Green's in interesting ways. Taking as his starting point Strauss's correspondence in the thirties, Bernstein argues that Maimonides represents for Strauss a philosopher "who is theoretically uncompromising in his advocacy of philosophy and who also wrote exoterically in order not to upset the community in which he lived" (xxvii). Maimonides recovered Platonic political philosophy and moved into Athens, where Strauss found him and also took up residence (47–48): Maimonides "was a citizen of Athens donning the outfit of Jerusalem" (131). Strauss too, following Machiavelli, conceals his blasphemy and thereby "compels the reader to think the blas-

¹² Green has rightly pointed out in a recent interview that it would be foolish to interrogate Strauss to discover his view of Jerusalem: "If some people might be inclined to set up a Jewish inquisition, and suspect every Jewish thinker or even every Jewish person, and to examine or interrogate them for how much, or how precisely, they believed in every article of the faith as defined by Maimonides, I can't vouch for what the exact result would have been in the case of Leo Strauss. But I also don't think that this is a very Jewish thing to do. Rather, we should judge Strauss by his actions; and in terms of these, we would see that he was a profoundly loyal Jew during his entire life" (<https://kavvanah.wordpress.com/2013/07/18/why-maimonides-matters-kenneth-hart-green-part-i/>). But, while relentless inquiry and theoretical boldness are unseemly for a citizen of Jerusalem, do such traits not characterize (leaving aside the violence) the spirit of inquiry in Athens?

phemy by himself and thus to become [his] accomplice.”¹³ Bernstein makes an even bolder argument in chapter 5, where he suggests that according to Strauss, both Spinoza and Maimonides shared the same “compulsion” for the truth, “be it construed as Platonic *eros*...or Spinozan *conatus*” (150). In this reading of *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, the “differences between the two...appear to be historical rather than philosophical. Differently stated, the divergence between the two thinkers concerns their modes of presentation more than the content of their thought” (153).

As for the differences between Spinoza and Maimonides, Bernstein argues that they are more apparent than real. Spinoza’s radical critique of religion, for example, was not original; rather it had been rediscovered by Machiavelli who in turn had learned it from medieval and pagan philosophy (127). In fact, it had been well known to Maimonides, who chose to conceal it from all except his more careful readers. Strauss says that Maimonides “brought the greatest sacrifice” by defending the Torah against the philosophers. Bernstein interprets this sacrifice to be Maimonides’s political and religious accommodation of his philosophic thought to the Jewish people, even though he affirmed the superiority of intellectual to moral virtue (129–32). From this point of view, the conflict between Jerusalem and Athens appears to be a version of the tension between the imagination and reason, which Spinoza describes as the problem of superstition. The fact that each presents a different solution to the conflict represents the historical or accidental circumstances in which each thinker found himself: “In another age, or even in another country, Spinoza would have been compelled by his principle of caution to make entirely different proposals for the protection of philosophy, without changing in the least his philosophical thought.”¹⁴

Had Bernstein merely portrayed Strauss as an advocate of Athens, his account would have been nearly identical to Heinrich Meier’s presentation of Strauss “as a political philosopher who never wavers from his attempts to disprove revelation” (137).¹⁵ Instead, Bernstein devotes much of his analysis

¹³ This is Strauss’s description of Machiavelli, but Bernstein uses it to describe Strauss’s treatment of Maimonides (see 127–28).

¹⁴ Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 192, quoted in Bernstein, 153.

¹⁵ In chapter 5, Bernstein distinguishes his position from Meier’s presentation of Strauss as a modern atheist political philosopher in *Leo Strauss and the Theological-Political Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). According to Bernstein, Meier’s presentation claims that Strauss does not take revelation seriously as an alternative to philosophy, but rather “holds that philosophy needs the existence of revelation only insofar as that existence allows philosophers to better see the

to Strauss's preoccupation with Judaism, particularly his efforts to rescue modern Jewish thought from its devotion to historicism and the belief in progress. One of the most fascinating sections of Bernstein's argument is his chapter "Strauss's Maimonides," which shows both Strauss's debt to his fellow scholars of Jewish thought and his radical rejection of their work. Bernstein also shows how Strauss's stay at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1954–55 culminated in his attempt to address the meaning of Zionism without undermining the modern Jewish state. In short, according to Bernstein, Strauss may not have been a believer, but he was certainly devoted to the study of Jewish thought (83, 23, 34). This paradox, that Strauss remained devoted to Judaism without being a believer, rests at the heart of Bernstein's inquiry. How did Strauss manage to reconcile the love of one's own with the love of the good?

Fittingly, Bernstein crafts his answer from Strauss's own remarks explaining that the prophets and Socrates do not live in the center of the city, but at the periphery: "The man who loves perfection and justice must leave the cities inhabited exclusively by the wicked, to search for a city inhabited by good men, and he must prefer, if he does not know of such a city or if he is prevented from bringing one about, wandering in the desert or in caverns to the association with evil men."¹⁶ According to Bernstein, Strauss chose to live "on the border" so that he could seek the good in full view of other alternatives. Some borders are more lasting and comprehensive than others. National borders, for example, are not as comprehensive as the border between reason and revelation, a border upon which the West itself was founded. Even though Strauss settled in Athens, he lived on the border where he had a full view of Jerusalem, where the attraction of revelation was perpetually in view. As a result, Strauss was able to resist dogmatism and sectarianism; in fact, this appears to be the precondition for philosophy, one shared by Maimonides, Spinoza, and Strauss.

To live on the border, for Bernstein, means to take seriously the tension between reason and revelation, and the centrality of this tension is easy to identify in the work of Maimonides and Strauss. The case of Spinoza is more challenging because the "chief purpose" of his *Theologico-Political Treatise* is

alternative to the philosophical way of life; in seeing this alternative, philosophers better understand their own way of life" (137).

¹⁶ Leo Strauss, "Some Remarks on the Political Science of Maimonides and Farabi," in *Complete Writings*, ed. Green, 305; quoted in Bernstein, 13 (cf. 85).

to redraw the borders.¹⁷ On this new map, revelation surrenders to reason all claims to the truth. Spinoza's residence may still be located on the outskirts, but the map seems to have changed dramatically. Furthermore, according to Strauss, Spinoza lived in temporary housing while he built a new city and a new church. The foundation for this city was a new conception of God. Spinoza "showed the way toward a new religion or religiousness which was to inspire a wholly new kind of society, a new kind of Church. He became the sole father of that new Church which was to be universal in fact."¹⁸ Bernstein admits that it appears "Spinoza's thought is the precise rejection of Maimonides's thought," but in fact remains closely attached to Maimonidean thought in maintaining the superiority of the theoretical life over the practical life (136). This philosopher does not move his residence, even if his neighbors—the particular form of superstition—move. Spinoza's claim that Maimonides wished to create "a new form of ecclesiastical authority," namely reason, turns out to apply equally well to Spinoza himself.

One might wonder whether Spinoza, in redrawing the borders and founding a new church, has managed to resist the temptation to dogma or, in other words, whether the revolt of philosophy initiated by Machiavelli remains located in Athens. Such questions and many others raised in these stimulating and important volumes are well worth pondering as we decide, as Strauss urges us to do, which city to live in: "No one can be both a philosopher and a theologian, or, for that matter, some possibility which transcends the conflict between philosophy and theology, or pretends to be a synthesis of both. But every one of us can be and ought to be either one or the other, the philosopher open to the challenge of theology, or the theologian open to the challenge of philosophy."¹⁹ Bernstein and Green have done a great service for students seeking residence in either Jerusalem or Athens by clarifying the fundamental issues that separate them.

¹⁷ Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, chap. 14.

¹⁸ Strauss, *JPCM*, 156.

¹⁹ Strauss, *JPCM*, 116.

Maurizio Viroli, *Redeeming the Prince: The Meaning of Machiavelli's Masterpiece*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015, 208 pp., \$26.95 (cloth), \$19.95 (paper).

GREGORY A. MCBRAYER
MOREHEAD STATE UNIVERSITY
g.mcbrayer@moreheadstate.edu

In honor of the 500th anniversary of the composition of Machiavelli's *Prince*, and at the prompting of Robert Tempio, senior editor at Princeton University Press, Maurizio Viroli wrote an essay to elucidate the meaning of Machiavelli's most famous work. Viroli has since expanded that essay into a commendable book. His thesis regarding the meaning of *The Prince* can be stated concisely: Machiavelli's lifelong dominant passion was to see Italy redeemed, and he accordingly composed *The Prince* to "design and invoke a redeeming prince. ...*The Prince's* most important political message is about the redemption of Italy" (45). Machiavelli aimed, above all, to inspire Italy's redeemer. Viroli offers a persuasive and compelling thesis, and his book, worthy reading for anyone interested in Machiavelli's political thought, encourages reflection on the intention of *The Prince*.

Viroli, one of world's most distinguished Machiavelli scholars, is currently professor emeritus of politics at Princeton University; professor of government at the University of Texas, Austin; and professor of political communication at the University of Italian Switzerland, Lugano. He has written many books on Machiavelli, both in English and in his native Italian. Those written in Italian have been translated into English, and vice versa, so his books on Machiavelli are available to scholars in both languages. The English titles of his works include *Machiavelli* (Oxford University Press, 1998), *Niccolò's Smile: A Biography of Machiavelli* (Farrar Straus Giroux, 2000), *How to*

Read Machiavelli (Granta, 2009), and *Machiavelli's God* (Princeton University Press, 2010). To this list he now adds the present work.

Redeeming the Prince consists of four relatively short chapters, as well as a list of figures, a preface, notes, and an index. The index includes a list of proper names, books cited, and a handful of topics. The book contains thirteen figures plus the frontispiece from the title page of Machiavelli's *Il Principe*. Interspersed throughout the book one finds photographs of, for example, Michelangelo's sculpture *Moses*, Giorgio Vasari's *Pope Leo X's Procession through Florence*, and the English School engraving *Martyrdom of Savonarola*. These images complement the text nicely, and offer the reader a pleasing opportunity to contemplate the people, events, and places to which the infamous Florentine refers and to reflect on their significance in his thought.

In his introduction, Viroli situates his approach to Machiavelli among the current dominant lines of interpretation. Machiavelli is not, in his view, a teacher of evil, a republican, or an inaugurator of modern political realism and modern political science. Nor is he the man who divorced politics from ethics. For Viroli, the primary purpose of *The Prince* is to "impel action," and he arrives at this conclusion, in large part, on the basis of his interpretation of the final chapter of the book. Viroli argues that that chapter, "Exhortation to Seize Italy and to Free Her from the Barbarians," is the key to unlocking the meaning of *The Prince*, and the rest of the work can and should be interpreted in its light. Much depends, then, on Viroli's interpretation of the final chapter.

Viroli discusses the "Exhortation" throughout his book, drawing upon it frequently and incorporating it into his analysis of other parts of *The Prince*. Since, however, so much of his analysis is bound up with this chapter, a more focused commentary on it would have strengthened his argument in the eyes of his detractors. The book is nevertheless impressive and largely persuasive: Viroli moves across *The Prince* freely and with confidence, demonstrating a clear command of the work. Moreover, Machiavelli's entire corpus is at the tips of his fingers; he regularly draws from Machiavelli's best-known works such as the *Discourses* and *Florentine Histories*, but also from his lesser-known works and private correspondence. The references to Machiavelli's private letters add context and generally support Viroli's interpretation of *The Prince*. They are also delightful treats for anyone interested in Machiavelli.

At times, however, Viroli's method leads him to be somewhat loose with the text. For example, in a discussion of the highest type of prince, the armed prophet who has acquired an entirely new principality by his own arms and

virtue, Viroli has Machiavelli say that Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus “were not *that* different” from Moses (23, emphasis mine), implying there was still a difference. But whether there is a difference makes all the difference in the world: did Moses introduce a new order on his own or did he receive his orders from God? Machiavelli says that if the actions and orders of Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus are considered, they will appear “no different” from those of Moses. (The translation Viroli uses says, “They will not appear different” [331]. The original runs, “parranno non discrepanti da quelli di Moisè.”) We thus risk missing Machiavelli’s suggestion that Moses, who appears to have “had so great a teacher,” in fact did not. Moses, in Machiavelli’s estimation, like the three other great princes he mentions, acquired his principality by his own arms and virtue.

Direct references to *The Prince* are concentrated in the first chapter, “The Prince as Redeemer.” This chapter contains the core of Viroli’s argument. Here he shows, from the text of *The Prince* but also from other sources, that Machiavelli sought to bring about a redeemer. Machiavelli is an Italian patriot who sought the liberation of his fatherland. While Viroli refers to the “Exhortation” in this chapter, however, he draws primarily, and with good reason, from chapter 6 of *The Prince*. Indeed, the thrust of Viroli’s argument in chapter 1 convincingly shows that Machiavelli sought to effect political change at the highest level; Machiavelli has a redeemer in mind greater than even the greatest political actors of his own time, like Ferdinand of Aragon. He had in mind men who created new and good political orders like Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus.

The notion of a redeemer, a singular human being who can liberate a nation, can strike one as extraordinarily fantastic, so Viroli devotes the second chapter to showing that his thesis regarding redemption is not at odds with Machiavelli’s much-celebrated realism. Machiavelli, he argues, is a realist with imagination, by which he means Machiavelli can conceive of a political world radically different from the one that currently exists but remains within the realm of possibility. Based on his “knowledge of history and the analysis of the human passions,” Machiavelli is aware of possibilities that appear to be impossible in present circumstances. Armed with the proper military power, and powerful ideas, political reality can be radically changed.

While arms and the military are essential to changing the political reality, Viroli focuses in the third chapter on the power of Machiavelli’s ideas and words to aid in this endeavor. Machiavelli, who had neither political power nor an army, shaped souls with his rhetoric. Viroli adumbrates the principles of

classical rhetoric and argues persuasively that Machiavelli employed classical rhetorical devices—including similes, images, irony, and metaphors—masterfully in his *Prince*. Fortune, as is well known, is metaphorically described as a woman, and the lion and the fox are images of force and deceit. While Viroli discusses the importance of rhetoric for interpreting the final chapter of *The Prince*, exploring the use of the whole range of rhetorical devices within it, and convincingly highlights its extraordinarily rhetorical character, the arrangement of the book as a whole, and in particular the placement of the final chapter, is also essential to understanding it. Since arrangement of the argument was an important part of classical rhetoric, our understanding *The Prince* would benefit from examining the principle of arrangement in classical rhetoric.

In the fourth and final chapter, Viroli aims to show that *The Prince* indeed had the impact that he claims Machiavelli intended. Viroli does so in three ways: First, he offers examples of other philosophers who turned to Machiavelli, retrieved the notion of a redeemer from him, and followed his lead in seeking to inspire redemptive political action. Here he offers the examples of Hegel and Fichte in Germany and Gramsci in Italy. Next, he points to political actors who were redeemers in the Machiavellian mold, leaders such as Oliver Cromwell, George Washington, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Otto von Bismarck. Finally, in the longest part of the chapter, he reviews the work of other scholars, from the nineteenth century onward, who view Machiavelli as a theorist of political emancipation, including Francesco de Sanctis, Pasquale Villari, and Oreste Tommasini, among others. The chapter—and thus the book—ends with a discussion of twentieth-century literary historian Luigi Russo. While Viroli marshals evidence in this chapter to show that his thesis has been borne out in fact, and thus provides a kind of conclusion, readers might have benefited from a more typical final chapter in which Viroli summarized his argument and presented his conclusions in concise fashion.

In any event, Viroli persuasively makes the case that Machiavelli aimed to effect great political change with his “small volume.” By way of conclusion, however, let me suggest that Machiavelli’s ambitions may have been even grander than Viroli here allows. First, Machiavelli elsewhere indicates that his interests in effecting political change were not limited to Italy. In his *Discourses*, Machiavelli says that he sought to find new modes and orders because he has always had a desire for those things that he believes will be to the common benefit of everyone (*Discourses* I, Preface). Next, regarding who Machiavelli’s redeemer might be, consider the following. In one of the

two epigraphs to his book, Viroli quotes from a letter by Filippo Casavecchia to Machiavelli from June of 1509: “Every day I discover you to be a greater prophet than the Hebrews or any other nation ever had.” Later in his book, Viroli persuasively argues that the final chapters of *The Prince* are written in a prophetic spirit and correctly draws the conclusion that Machiavelli presents himself as a prophet, one comparable in greatness to Moses. By casting himself as a prophet akin to Moses, Machiavelli leads the reader to consider whether Machiavelli himself is in the same class as those four most excellent princes of chapter 6: Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, or Theseus. As he says in chapter 15, he “departs from the orders of others”—a convoluted way of saying that he seeks to introduce new orders. Machiavelli’s *Prince* does not aim to inspire a redeemer of the highest order; rather, that redeemer is Machiavelli himself.

Rafael Major, ed., *Leo Strauss's Defense of the Philosophic Life: Reading "What Is Political Philosophy?"* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013, 232 pp., \$30 (paperback).

SUSAN MCWILLIAMS

POMONA COLLEGE

susan.mcwilliams@pomona.edu

Leo Strauss's Defense of the Philosophic Life is a readerly book. I mean that in several ways. First, it is a book about how to read the writings of Leo Strauss, particularly his signature *What Is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies*. Second, it is a book about how Strauss himself read—about Strauss as a reader of political philosophy and its history. Third, it is a book that is quite easy to read, especially given its often complex subject matter. Finally, it is a book that leaves you wanting to pick up other books and read more.

There has been plenty written about Leo Strauss, to be sure. But what this volume quietly sets into relief is how much of that writing has been either distracted by brash academic theatricality or directed to exploring intricate, intramural differences of scholarly interpretation. Against books about Strauss that are for either scandalmongers or insiders, here, thank goodness, is a book for people who merely want to be his readers. It may be hard to believe, but as editor Rafael Major tells us on the first page, this “is the first systematic textual study that seeks to understand a single work of Strauss on its own terms” (1).

That's not to say that this volume ignores the hullabaloo that surround Strauss's name. Major explains that he chose to focus on *What Is Political Philosophy?* not just because it ranges widely across all the major themes of Strauss's work but also because it was published before Strauss became a divisive figure among political scientists. (*What Is Political Philosophy?* was

published in 1959; Major dates Strauss's first foray into disciplinary controversy to 1962, when Strauss published a forceful attack on behavioral political science that helped to catalyze a virulent debate within the profession.) In telling that story, Major deftly encourages us to read *What Is Political Philosophy?* with the new eyes that come from trying to inhabit an older perspective—itsself, as this volume reminds us, a quintessentially Straussian move. One takes the past seriously in part to gain a broader perspective on the present; one reads a precontroversial Strauss seriously in part to gain a broader perspective on contemporary controversies around him. Given the framework of Major's introduction, these essays are able to illuminate certain debates about Strauss and Straussianism without belaboring or even drawing attention to them. The volume's focus on reading *What Is Political Philosophy?* on its own terms thus has the effect, almost paradoxically, of making a stronger contribution to present-day conversations about Strauss than most attempts that have been made to engage those conversations directly.

Each of the ten chapters of *Leo Strauss's Defense of the Philosophic Life* speaks to the corresponding chapter in *What Is Political Philosophy?*, and each chapter is written by a different scholar. This chapter-by-chapter approach is truly wonderful. It encourages you to read both books together. And it makes clear that the treatment of *What Is Political Philosophy?* in this edited volume is mostly comprehensive. (I say "mostly" because the one lamentable omission in *Leo Strauss's Defense of the Philosophic Life* lies in its neglect of the "Sixteen Appraisals"—book reviews, largely—that make up the last section of *What Is Political Philosophy?* Given that Strauss presumably chose to include those in his book with some reason and more than some care, it seems curious that their existence merits only a couple of passing remarks in what is otherwise a book that covers its subject with such care. Why did Strauss include those reviews, rather than others he could have chosen? How do they echo, engage, or depart from the themes of the book's formal chapters? What do those "appraisals" teach us about how to appraise Strauss's own aims and methods? I wish this volume suggested some answers to those questions.)

The structure of the book also helps to reveal certain interesting commonalities among the different scholars who approach Strauss in this book, commonalities that are themselves revealing about the nature and form of Strauss's contributions to political philosophy. It is hard to miss, for instance, how many of the authors begin with the observation that the chapter of Strauss's work in question presents a central and immediate interpretive puzzle. To wit: Christopher Nadon begins his chapter on "Restatement of

Xenophon's *Hiero*" by noting that "it is surprising how little Leo Strauss's 'Restatement of Xenophon's *Hiero*' has to say about Xenophon's *Hiero*," a fact which right away raises the question of what Strauss might really be doing in that essay (80). Joshua Parens opens his reflections on "Maimonides' Statement on Political Science" by focusing on the "strangeness" of Strauss's choice to devote attention to Maimonides. That strangeness, Parens notes, points directly to a series of big questions. Among these are: "Why, the reader should wonder, does Strauss engage in such historical studies, which are foreign not only to contemporary social scientists but also to the very thinkers, such as Maimonides, whom Strauss interprets in these historical studies (also) on Alfarabi, Hobbes, and Locke?" And "why does Strauss choose to write on two medieval political philosophers and two modern political philosophers, and why these two pairs: Alfarabi-Maimonides and Hobbes-Locke?" (116–17). Later in the volume, the first sentence of David Janssens's chapter is: "The presence of 'On a Forgotten Kind of Writing' within the whole of *What Is Political Philosophy?* is somewhat puzzling," since it seems at first glance that the chapter is out of place in the book (173). Why is it there, then, and how does it fit? It's a question similar to those that Susan Meld Shell raises about Strauss's last formal chapter in *What Is Political Philosophy?*, the subject of which is his friend Kurt Riezler. "An immediate question thus presents itself," Shell writes. "Why end a book devoted to the explication and recovery of political philosophy with what could be deemed a personal eulogy?" (191).

All of these questions are provocative and productive on their own. But taken in their pattern these chapter openings add up to more than the sum of their parts. They work to show both what it means to read with Strauss and what it means to read within Strauss. Together, they bring to the fore the kind of intellectual mystery that energizes Strauss's teaching and has made it so seductive to so many. Just as Strauss's writings, as Daniel Tanguay puts it, "succeed in rendering the quest for truth again exciting and challenging" by returning to fundamental questions and searching for the hints and subtleties that might ground some rediscovery of deeper meaning, these writings have similar success by approaching Strauss's own work in the same way (111).

These chapter openings also demonstrate the combination of humility and boldness that are distinctive of a Straussian approach: one must be humble when encountering the writing of great thinkers, particularly thinkers who are political philosophers. So when confronted with a seeming inconsistency or incoherence in such writing, one must not dismiss it as a careless mistake but take it as a clue, potentially, to some more ambiguous

and esoteric teaching. At the same time, one must be brave enough to expose the big mysteries, to ask the big questions, to plumb deeply and doggedly in the territory of big ideas, and to dare big answers. One must be humble enough to search for a hidden or ambiguous teaching through careful and patient study, but one must be bold enough to venture and ventriloquize that teaching in a great thinker's name. The student of political philosophy must learn to inhabit a very particular intellectual space; the search for that space is sought and modeled here.

In combination, in other words, these essays do more than elaborate and explain certain arguments in Strauss's work, although they do that well. They also echo and apply Strauss's style of interpretation to his own writing. In doing so, they demonstrate Strauss's appeal not just as a political philosopher, but as a *teacher* of political philosophers.

In his reflection on "On a Forgotten Kind of Writing," Janssens picks up on one of Strauss's most telling arguments, when Strauss takes up the question of why philosophers are so often engaged as teachers, especially of young people. Strauss claims that the philosopher is a person who values well-ordered souls. The philosopher thus cannot help but desire to help young people better order their souls—to educate them as potential philosophers. Thus, "the philosopher must go to the market place in order to fish there for potential philosophers."¹ In so doing, the philosopher is bound to come into contact with the political men of his time, men who are bound to be suspicious of his cause. Thus, by Strauss's account, the philosopher must learn to speak doubly, offering "a defense of philosophy that reassures the political men" while also "drawing the attention of thoughtful youngsters" (175).

Janssens doesn't make the obvious literary connection—to be fair, I can't find any interpreter of Strauss who *has* made the obvious connection—to Matthew 4, in which Jesus begins his ministry by promising to make his followers "fishers of men" and then walking through the marketplaces of Galilee. Strauss's quiet allusion to Jesus elevates the teaching of philosophy to a sacred plane. He suggests that for philosophers, some political shrewdness is probably necessary; one must speak the language of the marketplace in order to protect a place for what must be sanctified. The philosopher must be both a reverent and a political man. The theological-political problem, as so many of these essays observe, is not merely a problem for philosophy: it

¹ Leo Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1959), 125.

is a problem of and within philosophy. What political philosophy is, is the attempt to care for our souls.

Such attempts will not always or often succeed. Strauss also, in that image of philosopher as a fisher of people, hints at the problems of studenthood (or discipleship); even when one has success attracting new and potential philosophers, the results of that initial success may be ambiguous or even dangerous. "All philosophy carries within it both remedy and poison," writes Tanguay. "Strauss's thought is no exception" (111).

Major writes that "by posing questions with the patience to resist the demand for easy answers," Strauss makes us "aware of the possibility of a life of the mind that does not stifle the voice of our hearts" (15). These essays remind us that, as Strauss taught, when we lower our heads to the page, we may elevate our selves. This volume, a heartfelt and mindful book, is itself worth the kind of attention Strauss devoted to the best written words.

Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*. Edited with introduction and notes by Paul Guyer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 154 pp., \$15.95.

On Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry*

FRANK N. PAGANO

ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE

fpagano@sjc.edu

The reissuance of Paul Guyer's edition of Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* prompts a reconsideration of Burke's consistency: whether Burke's early theoretical works are consistent with his mature political tracts and whether he is a consistent defender of the modern political and philosophical tradition in general. Guyer observes: "In his later political career, Burke was considered a conservative defender of tradition, above all the tradition of Britain's 'unwritten constitution,' but in his youthful work in aesthetics he argued vigorously against the entire tradition of Western thought" (ix). A conservative, I shall initially suppose, tries to be consistent with a tradition on the grounds that it is traditional, but it is difficult to remain consistent with an entire tradition even if only a political tradition—not to speak of all of Western thought. A tradition may not be consistent within itself. Conservative consistency then requires selecting the points of consistency and giving an account when it is necessary to depart from a tradition in order to preserve it.

How do we place *A Philosophical Enquiry* within the Western tradition? Chronologically it belongs with a series of philosophical works written during the mid-eighteenth century that include Jean-Jacques Rousseau's first and second *Discourses* (published in 1750 and 1755) and Burke's own first

published work, *A Vindication of Natural Society* (first published 1756 and revised 1757). These works reevaluate the human implications of the Enlightenment project in light of the advances in mathematical physics, especially the more than half-century appropriation of the consequences of the publication of Isaac Newton's *Principia* (1687).¹ Burke's *A Vindication* and *A Philosophical Enquiry* have roughly the relationship to each other that Rousseau's *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* and his *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men* have. *A Vindication* has engendered strong disagreements about the degree to which it is a satire and what it is satirizing.² Nevertheless, according to the preface of 1757, "the design [of the work] was, to shew that, without the exertion of any considerable Forces, the same Engines which were employed for the Destruction of Religion, might be employed with equal Success for the Subversion of Government."³ Like the *First Discourse*, the purpose of *A Vindication* is to show the corrupting political influence of the Enlightenment. It is not merely a satire of the minor figure Lord Bolingbroke; the work also alludes to the political thought of Hobbes and Locke and probably Rousseau.⁴ In contrast, *A Philosophical Enquiry* is a writing whose doctrines not only link religion and politics but might contain arguments for discrediting them. Like the *Second Discourse* it is an enquiry that seeks the origin of human ideas, in this case our ideas of the sublime and beautiful, both of which are related to the notion of inequality. The first task then is to consider whether young Burke is consistent with himself.

Guyer notes that the enduring influence on aesthetics of *A Philosophical Enquiry* is to establish the two categories of the sublime and the beautiful (xxix–xxx). According to Burke these categories depend on pain and pleasure and the ideas associated with them that fall under the "two heads *self-preservation* and *society*; to the ends of one or the other of which all our passions are calculated to answer" (33). The sublime originates in pain or its expectation and the beautiful in pleasure. Guyer argues, rightly I think, that it is important that in the *Enquiry* the mental responses that the beautiful and sublime produce are physiological (xxvii). For example, Burke explains the effect of the sublime as increasing the tension of the nerves, a mechanical process understood in terms of Newtonian forces. Burke's physiology is, of

¹ Burke explicitly connects his aesthetics to Newton's science (*A Philosophical Enquiry*, 103).

² Edmund Burke, *A Vindication of Natural Society*, ed. Frank N. Pagano (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1982), xvi nn6–7.

³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 13n7, 15n8.

course, quite primitive in light of later scientific discoveries concerning electrical nerve impulses. Yet I doubt that a comparable explanation employing nerve impulses changes the argument substantially. The physiological argument reveals that Burke's aesthetics not only is compatible with Newtonian modern natural science but depends on it (103).

Burke makes his aesthetics consistent with modern political thought through the argument that the passions of self-preservation that "turn chiefly on *pain* and *danger*...are the most powerful of all the passions" (33). The sublime is linked to passions more powerful than is the beautiful. Indeed the sublime is connected to the powerful itself and the beautiful to the weak. Burke goes so far as to argue that men are attracted to shows of weakness in women (88). Politics and religion depend on the idea of the sublime. Society cannot rely on the structures connected to pleasure and love because the passions associated with them are feeble. The familial passions are not strong enough to sustain political society. The commonwealth's sovereign, just like the divine master, must be a "dread majesty" (55–57). The aesthetics of *A Philosophical Enquiry* is more consistent with the modern tradition linking Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Locke than with the ancient tradition of Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas. *A Philosophical Enquiry* is a modern tract following modern natural science and modern political science.

There are indeed ancient philosophies more similar to modern natural philosophy than are those of Plato and Aristotle. In the *Enquiry* Burke includes examples of the poetry of the Epicurean Lucretius, in the original Latin, and it is in the discussion of Lucretius that Burke breaks with the theoretical tradition of all the ancient philosophers. For Burke the ancient theoretical tradition cannot justify itself. Love, including philosophical friendship and the love of wisdom, is comparatively weak. It cannot resist the effects of the sublime. In the deepest instances it cannot resist the power of religious terror. Burke quotes (or rather, according to Guyer's note [146n57], misquotes) three lines from the beginning of book 3 of Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things*. These three lines appear immediately after Lucretius praises Epicurus. According to Lucretius, when Epicurus proclaims "the true nature of things revealed by [his] divine mind, the terrors of the mind are dispelled, the walls of the world dispart, and I see what happens throughout the whole void" (3.14–18).⁵ The lines that Burke misquotes then follow. Guyer translates the misquoted Latin lines as "with these things a certain Goddess of pleasure

⁵ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. Martin Ferguson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1969), 68.

drew me to you and what horror now to see your true nature revealed open and visible from every side” (146n57). On the basis of this quotation Burke criticizes Lucretius for his inconsistency: “Lucretius is a poet not to be suspected of giving way to superstitious terrors; yet when he supposes the whole mechanism of nature laid open by the master of his philosophy, his transport on this magnificent view which he has represented in the colours of such bold and lively poetry, is overcast with a shade of secret dread and horror” (56–57). Whether or not Burke’s misquotation is intentional, he interprets the lines to mean that ancient theory cannot overcome the human dread of an infinite mechanistic nature. The modern scientific vision of the world is too horrid to allow the philosophical life to enjoy the truth of the world without terror. The philosophical vision does not provide a safe refuge, a philosophical garden, from which to view the natural world. It does not produce a beautiful vision. In light of the discoveries of modern natural science ancient philosophy does not make for a pleasant and happy life. Even the ancient atomist Lucretius gives way to appeals to superstition. The scriptures do better than the philosophical poet at calling up the sublimity of the world and presenting it to the human mind (56).

Burke supplies two justifications for his own *Enquiry*—the one from theology and the other from philosophical utility (44–46). They seem to work against each other. The theological argument extols the study of the passions and the “organs of the mind” as an “uncommon union of science and admiration” in which we discover God’s “strength and wisdom even in our weakness and imperfection, honouring them where we discover them clearly, and adoring their profundity where we are lost in our search. ... We may be admitted into the counsels of the Almighty by a consideration of his works. The Elevation of the mind ought to be the principal end of all our studies” (45). Yet it is not evident that discovering the laws of human passions that begin in the sensations of pain and pleasure results in the elevation of the human mind rather than its reduction to the level of its primitive animal sensations of pain and pleasure. Do we find that the human mind is very little like the divine mind that designed it? The aesthetic doctrine of the *Enquiry* does seem, however, altogether compatible with the hope to gain power over humanity. Burke gives his second reason for his study: “But besides this great [theological] purpose, a consideration of the rationale of our passions seems to me very necessary for all who would affect them upon solid and sure principles. ... To affect them after a delicate manner, or to judge properly of any work designed to affect them, we should know the exact boundaries of their several jurisdictions; we should pursue them through all their variety

of operations and pierce into the inmost and what might appear inaccessible parts of our nature” (46). The two justifications for the *Enquiry* do not seem to have a theoretical reconciliation in the *Enquiry* itself. Modern philosophy depends on biblical revelation to sustain it as it penetrates into the confused realm of the inmost human mind. Contrary to its own philosophical findings about the mind, the theological argument of the *Enquiry* must presume that the discovery of the laws of the mind, however low or horrible these laws may indicate the mind is, elevate the mind. Certainly they increase the power of the one with the science to affect the minds of other men. In this regard it is a pursuit of power and power is sublime. Yet the sublime is also terrible. Not everything terrible is elevated (serpents). It is only the theological argument that assures that the pursuit of the science will elevate the mind. There does not seem to be a theoretical argument that unites the two purposes for pursuing the science of the mind: elevation of the mind in imitation of God’s and the useful power over the passions of the minds of humans in general. The science of the *Enquiry* therefore does not seem to contradict the underlying argument of *A Vindication of Natural Society*. Modern natural and political philosophies, which, according to Burke, actually rely on the support of the biblical religions, may subvert the religious foundations of society and therewith the foundations of modern philosophy. The young Burke seems to be consistent with himself. It is modern philosophy, according to him, that has brought into itself the paradox of relying on biblical religion and at the same time tending to subvert it. Does the *Enquiry* suggest any practical way to reconcile biblical religion and modern political philosophy?

Burke insisted that his mature political career was consistent, although his opponents accused him of inconsistency in his support of the American colonists against the home government and his opposition to the French Revolution. He did not in fact regard himself as a conservative, a term coined, I believe, by Chateaubriand in the nineteenth century, but as an old Whig. His career, he maintained, was devoted to a consistent defense of the mixed constitution revived in the Whig revolution of 1688. Like him, the old Whigs defended the ancient constitution in their revolution. They did not remake it. Neither politics nor morals are a product of a comprehensive human art: “Dark and inscrutable are the ways by which we come into the world. The instincts which give rise to this mysterious process of Nature are not of our making. But out of physical causes, unknown to us, perhaps unknowable, arise moral duties, which, as we are able perfectly to comprehend, we are

bound indispensably to perform.”⁶ The mature Burke did not think that there is a science that can construct the morals and constitution of a people. In this regard the *Enquiry* has nothing to add. Nation building is too complicated for human science. But is there a science that can defend a well-ordered society? And if so did Burke employ this science?

The modern poet that Burke refers to most frequently in the *Enquiry* is John Milton. Milton was a republican—something the mature Burke decidedly denies that he is. Yet Milton was the master, according to Burke, of sublime poetry. It does not require subtlety to see that the absolute monarchy of Milton’s Satan, the progenitor of death, in a cosmic context replicates the absolute monarchy of Hobbes that also is dependent on the generation of the fear of death. In fact Burke praises the sublimity of Milton’s description of death (49). Milton’s poetry was consistent with the political taste of the instigators of the Whig revolution of 1688 that rebelled against the encroachments of the monarchy on the British constitution. The constitution of a people is too intricate, too refined for there to be an architect of its government. There is no science that instructs a statesman how to form a people. Yet there may be a science of the defense of the constitution of a people. Sublimity fixes the mind. Poets of the sublime may fix the tastes of a people. Using the science of the *Enquiry* philosophical critics may divine which poets are best for preserving and fixing the political and moral taste of a people and which corrupt it. In this way the young Burke is consistent with the mature Burke. Readers of Burke who charge him with inconsistency mistakenly treat the inconsistencies of the modern philosophical tradition as peculiar to Burke. He is a defender of modernity against itself.

⁶ Edmund Burke, “An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs,” in *The Works of Edmund Burke* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1899), 4:166.

Andrea Radasanu, ed., *In Search of Humanity: Essays in Honor of Clifford Orwin*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015, 562 pp., \$140 (hardcover).

DAVID LEWIS SCHAEFER

COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS

dschaefer@holycross.edu

It is uncommon to encounter a *Festschrift* honoring a scholar who has authored only one book—albeit an outstanding one—even when his work also includes numerous important scholarly articles on various topics. The diverse and generally excellent contributions to the present substantial volume make clear why Clifford Orwin is an exception to that rule. As several of the authors attest in writing, but all of them demonstrate by their example, Orwin is not only a learned, thoughtful, and provocative scholar; he is an unusually devoted and gifted teacher who has served as an inspiration to students and colleagues in the three disciplines he has taught for several decades at the University of Toronto (political philosophy, classics, and Jewish studies), as well as in related fields such as English and law. The volume of Orwin’s accomplishments consists not only in the publications appearing under his name, but to an unusually broad extent in the impressive work undertaken by those he influenced.

The title of this volume draws on that of Orwin’s magnum opus *The Humanity of Thucydides*, one of the most comprehensive and illuminating studies ever written of that author. But it more fundamentally reflects, as the editor explains, Orwin’s career-long interest in the characteristic modern virtue of “humanity,” originally the Machiavellian, this-worldly substitute for Christian mercy or compassion, but one that was transformed over the course of centuries from a “hard” determination to protect human beings

against the vicissitudes of nature or fortune by means that paradoxically included “cruelty” into a “soft,” Rousseauan “aversion to suffering as such.”

In Search of Humanity is divided into four parts, arranged chronologically by topic. Part 1, “Ancient Inquiries into Humanity,” includes several essays on Thucydides, as well as studies of Aeschylus, Xenophon, Aristotle, and Josephus. Part 2 explores the transformation of Christian charity into the modern virtue of “conquering” nature for the sake of relieving the human condition, as seen in or by such authors as Machiavelli, Shakespeare, Descartes, and Spinoza. In part 3, contributors examine “compassion and the angst of late modernity” in philosophers such as Locke, Rousseau, and Hegel, as well as the relation between reason and revelation in the thought of Leo Strauss. Part 4, “Liberalism, Humanitarianism, and Contemporary Affairs,” includes two essays on Kant; consideration of the modern doctrine of sovereignty and of the prospects for democracy in the contemporary world; a study of the relevance of Plato for the issue of “humane warfare”; and a “polemic” advocating “Socratic pedagogy” over “postmodern partisanship” in liberal education.

Given the impossibility of doing justice here to all thirty-two contributions, I have chosen to focus on a number of essays that consider the crucial theme of the relation between freedom and necessity, or the extent of human moral responsibility, as conceived by Thucydides and several other great authors both ancient and modern. In the opening chapter, Orwin’s former student Mark Lutz examines how Aeschylus portrays the “civilization of the gods” in his *Eumenides*, showing how Athena educates the pre-Olympian Furies so as to overcome their identification of justice with traditional piety and the vindictive punishment of those who violate it. The play demonstrates how “the principles of justice may seem to contradict one another,” compelling citizens to “use reasoned argument” to apply them. At the same time, Lutz concludes, the *Eumenides* opens up the possibility—elaborated by Thucydides—that “reasonable gods” will recognize the extent to which human beings “are compelled by necessity to act” as they do, thus calling into question the grounds of punitive justice (human as well as divine) (14–15).

A different perspective on moral responsibility in Thucydides is set forth in an essay by Orwin’s colleague Ryan Balot, “Philosophy and ‘Humanity’: Reflections on Thucydidean Piety, Justice, and Necessity,” which expressly challenges Orwin’s interpretation of that author. Whereas “Orwin’s Diodotus, and hence his Thucydides, maintains a version of the Socratic ‘paradox’ that vice is ignorance and virtue is knowledge,” and Orwin similarly regards

“the Athenian thesis” regarding the compelling power of fear, gain, and honor, “suitably qualified,” as true—in contrast to conventional piety’s condemnation of *hamartēma* as blameworthy moral error—Balot attributes to Thucydides’s Athenians a doctrine of “moral luck” and a consequent “tragic world view” (manifest in Sophocles’s *Oedipus Tyrannos*), according to which human beings are responsible “even for acts that they committed under life-threatening duress” (20–21). One may question Balot’s use of Aristotle’s *Ethics* to support this extended view of moral responsibility, as well as the meaningfulness of his suggestion that Thucydides holds only “the flesh,” as distinguished from justice, to be “weak” (29). But Balot does offer fruitful matter for debate with Orwin in these regards.

More moderate, and more in harmony with Orwin’s view, is the treatment of the role of treaties in Thucydides in an essay by Robert Howse and Noah Lawrence arguing that “the problem for right in Thucydides’ universe is not that it does not exist, but that it is vulnerable to the compulsions that bear upon cities...as well as dependent on a certain level of trust which can easily be broken in times of conflict” (36). Preserving treaties may hence require not only a certain balance of power among the contracting powers, but also “some appearance” of religious sanction (49).

A more direct response to Balot is implied in S. N. Jaffe’s “Reflections on the Humanity (and Inhumanity) of Thucydides,” which emphasizes the “education to necessity” that the historian provides his readers, albeit one that is distinct from the “violent” but nonintellectual “education” inculcated by the Spartan laws. The real “tragedy of war” in Thucydides’s view, according to Jaffe, is not the fact of suffering but rather that political actors must inevitably act with uncertainty about whether a particular experience of suffering “can be averted” (58–59). (As Henry Kissinger emphasizes in his book *Diplomacy*, nations that await positive proof of their rivals’ hostile intentions before acting often doom themselves to far greater suffering—as the Western allies did prior to World War II, and as the United States may have done in its recently completed negotiations with Iran.) It is in his appreciation of *this* tragic aspect of the human condition, Jaffe suggests, that Thucydides’s “humanity” (and his contrast with Machiavelli’s nontragic view) lies.

Passing over the outstanding Thucydidean essays by Michael Palmer and Andrea Radasanu, I turn to Lorraine Smith Pangle’s chapter “Moral Indignation, Magnanimity, and Philosophy in the Trial of the Armenian King,” on Xenophon’s *Cyropaedeia*. Pangle demonstrates how a Socratic-like understanding of vice as the product of ignorance of one’s true interest rather than

of malice (here, the teaching of a sophist), far from encouraging immorality (as Balot seems to fear), may moderate a conqueror's conduct (just as Diodotus and his portrayer appear to have maintained). At the same time, Pangle intriguingly suggests that while Xenophon's Cyrus (and his subjects) profited from his acquiring an education in the Socratic view of justice, his crucial deficiency is a failure to benefit from the Socratic understanding of "erotics," and his consequent inability to reflect on "his own deepest yearnings" (113).

The issue of moral responsibility underwent a fundamental transformation in the Christian world, as exemplified in Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of *synderesis*, the faculty through which the first principles of the natural law, along with an inclination to follow them, are implanted in all human beings by God—thus making the individual wholly responsible (and deserving of punishment) for succumbing instead to his vicious desires. Henry Higuera's essay "New Virtue for Masters of Nature" explains how Descartes, in turn, endeavors to portray his project of mastering nature for the sake of relieving man's earthly estate—rather than directing him towards his spiritual perfection—as superior to the classical and medieval views, partly by means of "a reworking of the notion of free will" along with the "invention of a new highest virtue" of *générosité* (245). Descartes represents the sheer use of man's "free will" or "the dominion we have over our volitions" as the ground of human self-esteem—regardless of the particular use to which we put our will (250). But Higuera supplies ground for doubting that Descartes actually believed in his free-will doctrine, regarding it rather as an exoteric doctrine best suited for winning popular support for the mastery of nature. (Although Higuera notes the democratic aspect of "substituting volition for habituation" in comparison with Aristotle's moral teaching, it is less clear why it is any more democratic, morally, than the Thomistic doctrine, as Higuera contends. Higuera does properly stress Descartes's reevaluation of pride in comparison with Christianity, along with the "generous" man's self-esteem in contrast with the love of the noble that characterizes Aristotle's magnanimous man. Of particular interest, however, is Higuera's observation of the proto-Kantian character of Descartes's new doctrine [253–55].)

This brings me to consider Arthur Melzer's "Character vs. Free Will: Aristotle and Kant on Moral Responsibility." Melzer aims to correct a great contemporary "misconception" about morality, for which he blames Kant: its equation with a "good will." By contrast, he observes, for Aristotle "the 'will' as a separate faculty and as the seat of morality does not even exist," since morality constitutes a form of *character* that derives from habituation.

Reflecting what Higuera represented as Descartes's exoteric teaching, "modern thought under the influence of Rousseau and Kant conceives freedom to be not merely the precondition of morality but its very essence." Yet this outlook contradicts the commonsense understanding of moral character as "the very opposite of freedom, something like 'backbone'—that is, rigidity, fixity, and unfreedom" (436).

While both Kant and Aristotle appeal to our "moral intuitions" to clarify the nature of morality, Melzer notes, Aristotle displays "the inner unclarity and complexity" of those intuitions, notably the "tension," for moral action, between "freedom" and "fixity." By contrast, Kant, following Descartes's "anti-dialectical footsteps," aims to discover an indubitable foundation from which morality can be systematically derived, at the expense of "jettisoning... a great deal of common sense wisdom" (437). Among the problems that result from Kant's representation of morality as "self-conquest" is that it must be supported by a high level of moralistic, religious, or (recently) ideological passion—feared by Aristotle as "a dangerous and unhealthy" political force. The consequence, as seen in contemporary America (and as foreseen, I note, by Tocqueville), is a problematic combination of "hardheaded, enlightened self-interest" with moral and spiritual "enthusiasms"—reflecting Kant's radical severance between moral virtue and happiness (441–42).

Kant's fundamental error, Melzer suggests, lies in his un-Aristotelian attempt to make morality, rather than wisdom, "the highest thing and give it all the dignity of rationality," exaggerating the rationality of ordinary human life. At the same time, Melzer traces Kant's rejection of habit-based morality to Machiavelli's objection that it deprives men of the "flexibility" that the conquest of fortune requires—as reflected in the habit-free education of Rousseau's *Emile*, in whom a passion like pity, patriotism, or religion instead provides the foundation of virtue.

Here, then, we come full circle, from the attempt by Thucydides as well as Aristotle to tame excessive moralism and the vengefulness and irrationality it inspires; to the early modern endeavor, in response to the excesses of Christian theocracy, to redirect human desires towards the enhancement of earthly comfort and lengthened life-span, in harmony with philosophers who are now seen as advancing those goals; towards the resultant "angst" stemming from dissatisfaction with those "low but solid" goals, but without engendering an attempted return to the classical understanding of the relation between reason and society, producing instead an endeavor to create a cosmopolitan, egalitarian society on the basis of compassion (the other

greatest pole, besides Thucydides, of Orwin's scholarship). Two excellent essays on Rousseau by Bryan-Paul Frost and Christopher Kelly, I add, show that the Genevan was far from an unqualified believer in such cosmopolitanism and egalitarianism—despite his subsequent influence in that direction (including his influence on Kant).

It is an appropriate reflection of Orwin's endeavor that three of the essays in the last two parts of *In Search of Humanity*—by Waller Newell (on Hegel), Susan Shell (on Kant), and Michael Rosano (on Socratic pedagogy)—dwell on the need, and the means, of preserving a genuine, questioning, great-books-based liberal education in the present time. Like his great model, Leo Strauss, Orwin has aimed to illuminate the fundamental human problems and encourage serious reflection on them, rather than advocate any sort of simplistic, partisan solutions. The contributions to this volume attest to a life, and career, well lived.

This volume is incomplete in only one respect: it should have included a bibliography of Orwin's writings.

James Allan, *Democracy in Decline: Steps in the Wrong Direction*. Montreal and Kingston, ON: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 2014, xv + 181pp., \$29.95.

THOMAS E. SCHNEIDER
UNIVERSITY OF ST. FRANCIS, FORT WAYNE
TSchneider@sf.edu

James Allan has written a thought-provoking book about the decline of majoritarian democracy in five countries with the oldest such governments: the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Despite important differences among these countries, he finds the same causes of decline at work in all of them, though not in precisely the same ways or to the same degree. The main causes are four: first, the behavior of judges, who as a class are less deferential than they once were to the elected branches of government; second, international law, to which judges and others increasingly look for guidance in domestic matters; third, supranational organizations, above all in the United Kingdom as a member of the European Union; and finally—and perhaps most fundamentally—the influence of “undemocratic elites,” who have shown a “loss of faith. . . in the ultimate good sense, and judgment, and morality of the majority of their fellow citizens” (122). This group includes even some elected politicians, not least those in the United States, “who at times prefer winning their battles in the courts rather than in the court of public opinion” (124). The evidence is striking, and the argument appears to be all but unanswerable except by those who put other considerations ahead of democratic decision-making.

Allan concedes that the number of such people is not small. In his words, there are many who “want their democracy tempered by trade-offs,” such as federalism—the overrepresentation of small-state residents in the US

Senate is a case in point—or even “a powerful judiciary interpreting a morally charged bill of rights” (137). The second example is closer to the heart of his argument, as three of the countries he examines—Canada (1982), New Zealand (1990), and the United Kingdom (2000)—have given themselves bills of rights in recent decades. (Neither the United Kingdom nor New Zealand has a written constitution, but their statutory bills of rights have been interpreted by judges much as if they were constitutional.) Few of these critics of democracy are willing to defend their views openly, however. Instead, they have adopted the ploy (as Allan calls it) of redefining democracy in “fat,” morally pregnant terms (132–38). “Democracy,” according to this new definition, “now requires particular substantive outcomes,” namely that “the laws passed and the decisions taken [by public officials] have reached a certain level of rights-respectingness” (133). As Allan points out, to speak of democracy in this way makes it very hard to say that an action a country has taken is both democratic and wrong. The new definition conflates two distinct criteria: the process by which a decision has been reached (democratic or undemocratic) and the outcome of that process (wise or foolish, just or unjust, etc.).

Allan’s use of the word “ploy” suggests that those who have adopted the “fat” definition of democracy are being deliberately misleading. It seems just as likely that they lack clarity in their own minds. However that may be, it isn’t clear what he could say to someone who frankly avowed that he or she cared only about the outcome—that it be rights respecting—and was indifferent about the process. In a number of places he asserts that majoritarian democracies have a better record than other kinds of governments when it comes to rights-respectingness. Even if this is true, it cannot be an adequate defense of democracies over nondemocracies. If someone could prove that a nondemocratic form of government—perhaps a form not yet invented—is more rights respecting than democracies have been, Allan would then have to admit that his defense of democracy was a failure. Though he obviously thinks democracy is choiceworthy for reasons that go beyond rights-respectingness, he fails to offer a philosophical argument for his preference. He assumes that his readers are “partisans of democracy” like himself; he doesn’t tell them why they should be if they aren’t.

In some respects Allan’s understanding of democracy resembles Abraham Lincoln’s—in fact he implicitly makes this identification by quoting the conclusion of the Gettysburg Address (162)—but his differences with Lincoln are just as revealing. Lincoln knew that an unobjectionably democratic process could result in a morally objectionable outcome; he had seen

it happen when Congress repealed the Missouri Compromise in 1854 and thereby opened the Northern territories to slavery. At the same time he refused to join with the abolitionists, who thought that achieving a morally worthy outcome justified an undemocratic process. His response to the Kansas-Nebraska Act was to try to persuade Americans who supported this legislation that they were committing a grave mistake. Lincoln argued that the antislavery cause was grounded on the very same principle of equality as democracy itself. A consistent opponent of slavery must also be a democrat, just as a consistent democrat must also be an opponent of slavery. To put it in Allan's terms, Lincoln believed that majoritarian democracy, "thin" as its conception may appear, requires a "fat" understanding of politics for its defense; and he argued for such an understanding. The absence of an argument for democracy that might win over undemocratic elites is the principal shortcoming in Allan's otherwise insightful book.

Dieter Grimm, *Sovereignty: The Origin and Future of a Political and Legal Concept*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, 167 pp., \$25.00 (paper).

STEPHEN SIMS

BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

Stephen_Sims@baylor.edu

In both political theory and international relations theory, few topics are as commonly or hotly debated as the advantages and disadvantages of the concept “sovereignty” for political life. The disagreement as it is usually defined in contemporary discourse could be posed in this way: is sovereignty, understood as the autonomy and attendant supreme power in a political community, a safeguard of a people’s freedom and a way of reducing international conflict, or is it the refuge of tyrants and all inhumane rulers who seek asylum from the watchful eyes of the “international community”? Although few reject the notion of sovereignty altogether, it is often proposed that its meaning be altered to fit the contemporary world, especially its concern for human rights and democratic freedoms. The question therefore arises: what did sovereignty originally mean, and how should we change its meaning?

Drawing on political and legal theory on the subject of sovereignty, vast as it is, Dieter Grimm offers in this concise and elucidating volume an answer to the above question. He begins with a discussion of the problem of sovereignty, showing that the term is fluid and shifts over time, especially when applied to constitutional and federal states. The shifts in meaning, he suggests, help to explain why the concept is often reviled by well-meaning human rights activists, and why its supporters have trouble providing adequate definitions. Grimm then proceeds to offer a chapter on the political theory of Jean Bodin, who enunciated the modern theory of sovereignty, a chapter on constitutionalism and sovereignty, and a chapter on international relations

and sovereignty. He concludes by considering contemporary debates over sovereignty, and offers a qualified defense of the usefulness of sovereignty as a way of protecting democratic governance.

Grimm's beginning focuses on the advantage of studying the concept through a historical lens, to counter what he calls "ahistorical" considerations on sovereignty (4). Because forms of political rule change over time, the content of sovereignty must also change over time. Likewise, because the terms signifying sovereignty took root in various locales and intellectual traditions, so the meaning of sovereignty will differ from place to place as well as from time to time. Although Grimm's understanding of sovereignty as something nebulous throws into doubt the very existence of a reality that the term might signify, he nevertheless ends his introduction by claiming that sovereignty persists in today's discourse because it signifies the enduring desire for a political community to be free. That is, it signifies a permanent political reality of sorts.

Grimm turns to Bodin to uncover the original meaning of sovereignty, but acknowledges that Bodin did not invent the concept out of whole cloth. The term was traditionally applied to individuals who ruled—most prominently to God, but also to the pope. Grimm makes clear that although the term was in use during the heyday of feudalism, we should be careful to understand how it was used in medieval political theory. The primacy in medieval political theory of God's rule over the cosmos, and of His natural law ruling over human law, is evidence that there is no place in that political theory for modern conceptions of sovereignty, with their emphasis on political autonomy and power. The older concept understands sovereignty as the power that attends a political ruler in his capacity as the dispenser of justice, rooted in natural law and originating from the reason of God. The sovereign was understood as ruler insofar as he participated in the natural and divine order of the universe. The traditional medieval concept has little to do with "autonomy."

The medieval political order reflected unity of faith, shared by Europeans, concerning the natural and divine order participated in by human beings. When that unity was ruptured through revolutionary Protestantism there arose the need for a new political theory, including the place of the ruler. If there was no agreement about the relation of the political order to the natural or divine order, what becomes of dispensing justice? Grimm relates the connection between the dawn of modern political absolutism and sovereignty—Bodin's absolutism, like Hobbes's, is founded on a desire for domestic peace that requires the limitation of political conflict, which in turn

requires the centralization of political power, especially legislative power. This, of course, means that the claims of the church must be abrogated, and the laws of nature ignored. Although Bodin is famously unclear regarding the relation of the natural law to the sovereign's will, Grimm concludes that his political theory offers only one criterion for the validity of a law, namely, the ruler's will.

In Grimm's view, Bodin's significance lies in his stabilizing the political order in the face of religious plurality, and he points to a number of historical examples to show this immediate effect that Bodin's teaching had on Europe. Political theorists, statesmen, and lawyers, especially, in France, tried to understand the French regime in terms of Bodin's theory of sovereignty. Hobbes's political theory, moreover, can be considered a response to Bodin. Hobbes combined the irresistible power of the sovereign with the primordial freedom argued for by the Calvinists *against* Bodin, thus providing a liberal foundation and legitimation to political absolutism. Grimm claims that Locke saw a fundamental flaw in Hobbes's political theory—humans do not merely wish to avoid violent death, but also want to be more secure from the oppressions of the state than Hobbes's theory allowed. Accordingly, Locke attempted to liberate the people from the state by way of natural rights. Rousseau was able to combine human aspirations for freedom with the irresistible power of the sovereign by making the people the original and perpetual sovereign.

In his next chapter, Grimm shifts his attention toward constitutionalism, with the obvious challenge it offers to the absolute power attached to sovereignty as theorized in early modern political thought. The replacement of traditional rulers with a legal document, of the rule of human will with the rule of law, led to some disquieting questions about where the authority to make such a law originated. The history of the early United States, in particular, poses vexing problems for modern political theorists. There was no concrete person or set of persons that one could point to as the holder of sovereign power, in the sense that Bodin defined it. Could law itself be sovereign? Or do the people as a whole constitute the sovereign, as the American Constitution implies? But how could an entire people wield sovereign power? Federalism added another wrinkle to the question of sovereignty: did the whole or the parts possess supreme authority? Grimm spends time on the nullification crisis in South Carolina, tracing out the main lines of debate as to whether the US Constitution was a document enacted by a single people, or whether it was more like an international treaty, as John Calhoun maintained.

Calhoun argued that because the people of each state participated in a shared historical experience, each state in fact was a distinct political community (as opposed to the American people). Thus in Calhoun's political philosophy the problems come together: shared historical experience of individual peoples made it clear that there could be no sovereign American people, and thus no sovereign national government. The necessary consequence for Calhoun was that the Constitution, of necessity, could be only an international treaty. Searching for an alternative to Calhoun, Grimm suggests that Tocqueville's theory of divided sovereignty was a good solution to the problem, but unfortunately he does not go into detail regarding Tocqueville's and Calhoun's competing notions about the origins and possibilities regarding the American experience. Regardless of what this comparison might reveal, Grimm argues that the perplexities of modern states, both constitutional and federal, concerning the doctrine of sovereignty are evidence that sovereignty remained fundamental to modern states, although what power it conveyed and where it lay continued to be the subject of much debate. Grimm concludes that the obvious problems of ascribing sovereignty to the "people" mean that sovereignty becomes a very different thing in constitutional states. As he puts it, "the sovereign remains only an abstract subject for the ascription of acts of public authority" (73). In other words, constitutionalism moved sovereignty away from Leviathan to whatever agency had care for the common good. In doing so, one might suggest—although Grimm does not take this step—that constitutionalism is more akin to medieval political theory than to modern.

One of the effects of modern theorists' ideas about sovereignty was the tendency toward centralizing political power around distinct political communities, which is the corollary to the decentralization of Christendom and the decline of the Holy Roman Empire. Modern international politics is the side effect of modern political theory, perhaps unintended but unavoidable. After uncovering the development of sovereignty in political theory and the rise of the constitutional state, Grimm reasonably turns toward "external sovereignty," the sovereignty that is such a cornerstone of international relations and the flipside of the sovereignty found in the political theory of someone like Bodin. Grimm begins his discussion by arguing that the "crucial phenomenon in understanding modern sovereignty, in contrast to its medieval counterpart, is the territorialization of political rule by means of state formation" (77). In medieval politics, God and nature were standards by which the ruler could be measured, but modern politics is marked by the ruler being answerable to no one, either inside or outside the space over which his rule extends. Modern sovereignty therefore inheres within a certain space, and

does not go beyond it. Control over the borders of one's own political community now became far more important than it had been in the past. The corollary of that control is freedom from external rule. This freedom entailed a kind of "right" to be free from the rule of others, and thus sovereignty as a legal status, and with it international law, was born. External sovereignty, then, is the legalization of the rupturing of medieval Europe.

When sovereignty is understood to inhere in territory rather than in persons, it becomes possible to identify a people with its territory rather than with its rulers, or even its form of government. France remains France, regardless of its regime, of whether it is ruled by a Louis XVI or a Robespierre. International law developed as a way of regulating the relations between such territorially distinct states. Because international law in its inception involved only states understood as being certain spaces on a map rather than individuals or regimes, it could not be concerned with the internal order of a state. Indeed, because international law relied on state sovereignty, which entailed freedom from external rule, the very notion of international law would be violated if it attempted to concern itself with the regime of a state and the relation between the ruler and the ruled. This point is not merely academic, for it gets to the heart of why something like human rights law did not exist inasmuch as international law could not in theory protect or advance fundamental claims about justice. To be sure, this did not mean that states were never moved by fundamental claims about justice—the historical practice of statecraft has always been a far messier affair than theories of sovereignty and international law allowed.

The existence of state sovereignty, and with it international law based upon the assumption that each government is supreme within its own territory, also reveals why no higher body in international politics is theoretically feasible. Because the subjects of international law are sovereign states, and not individual humans beings, international law could at best be understood as customs and the "shared belief" that those customs were indeed law, including basic convictions like nonintervention. International law is not made so by any identifiable legislator, even in the case of treaty obligations—those obligations extend only to the signatories of treaties, and more importantly, they are self-imposed. Owing to the self-imposition of treaty obligations, international law as a whole can be upheld and enforced only by individual states willing to enforce the law. There is no supranational authority to do so, because such an authority would undermine the entire edifice, commonly called the "Westphalian" legal order.

Grimm rightly points out that this legal order has undergone some dramatic changes, especially in the last parts of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century, though those changes had small and conventional beginnings. International organizations were developed to deal with specific technical transnational problems, such as the Universal Postal Union. Statesmen attempted to forge a workable system of collective security via treaty obligations. These developments foreshadowed the contemporary international system, but did not change the nature of the system. As Grimm sees it, only World War II brought a fundamental shift in state sovereignty with the formation of the United Nations. Members of the UN gave up the right to threaten or use force to assert legal rights, and military power was relegated to “self-defense against aggression,” though the meanings of “self-defense” and “aggression” were left unclear. Grimm points out that promising never to use military force except for self-defense is not itself a particularly revolutionary act, since like all international law such a promise is self-imposed; what was revolutionary was the empowerment of the UN to use military force if it received the appropriate means from member states and was authorized to do so by the states that made up the Security Council.

However impressive the UN is compared to previous international organizations, Grimm argues that it pales in comparison to the accomplishment of the European Union. The European Court of Human Rights, although adopted under the aegis of international law, allows states to take each other to court over alleged human rights violations, thus infringing upon the internal affairs of a state. Further, individuals are permitted to proceed legally against member states for violations of the rights guaranteed in the European Convention on Human Rights. But because the courts that adjudicate claims about human rights violations are themselves creatures of international law, the courts can only determine that a state has violated a treaty. It is up to other members of the treaty to enforce the law. While allowing for oversight of human rights and official venues to make claims about violations of human rights, the fundamental relationship between sovereign states remains the same.

In the “core areas of European integration,” as Grimm calls them, classical international law no longer applies at all. Especially regarding economic policy, European states have transferred the rights long held to be integral to sovereignty to the European Union. As Grimm puts it, “in foreign affairs, no state is sovereign in the sense in which states were sovereign in the nineteenth century” since “they are no longer the sole rulers of their territory. Instead, external acts of a legislative, administrative and judicial nature—often

enacted with the cooperation of the affected states but frequently without it—claim effect on this territory” (91).

Given the specter of technocratic economists and judicial international control over the affairs of individual states, one might suppose that the future will truly be “postsovereign.” Grimm, however, is not sanguine about the future of a world run by international organizations that are responsible for no particular political community and, more importantly, accountable to no particular political community. He points out that because international organizations and supranational institutions must, of necessity, exist under the aegis of international law, they are not “self-determining.” They receive their *raison d’être* from the treaty, signed by states. Their legal basis is easily located outside the organization or institution itself, and thus they differ, essentially, from the legal basis of constitutional states. In other words, they are the artifacts of the will of those states that formed them. True political communities, like sovereign states, “decide upon the purpose and form of their political unity” (96). Thus, while certain powers that traditionally have been held by national government have been given over to international organizations, they cannot be called true political communities. It is through this fact that Grimm reopens the question of the continued existence of and justification for sovereignty.

In order to defend state sovereignty, Grimm tries to show that the concept has “explanatory value and fulfills a function that cannot be expressed by related concepts” (103). Grimm argues that sovereignty does not mean unlimited power, or undivided power, or power in a particular person. “With the emergence of the constitutional state” only democracy could be recognized “as the legitimating principle for political rule...in the act of constitution making” (106). It is in this act of “constitution making” or laying down the fundamental nature of the regime—one might say founding—that we see the essence of sovereignty. It lies in the making of a political order. Grimm notes that it is in this that a sovereign state is fundamentally different from an international organization or a supranational institution. Thus, Grimm argues that what we mean when we talk about the sovereignty of a state is the ability of the people of that state to determine the fundamental questions of politics for themselves, and without requiring the consent of others. Various political powers can be handed over to international organizations, but not the power to determine the “identity,” in Grimm’s language, of a people.

Grimm concludes by taking up the quarrel between those who defend sovereignty and those who argue that sovereignty must give way to a brave

new world of human rights. Grimm appears as an unapologetic defender of state sovereignty, which he believes is irreversibly attached to a kind of democratic understanding of politics. He points out that while serving “individual well-being” is good, we cannot forget that well-being “is always realized in a community” in which “there will always be different opinions about [its] meaning.” “The scope and range of human rights and the best way to accommodate conflicting rights are controversial issues and thus require political decisions” (125). To take those decisions out of the hands of local peoples would be the admission that democracy is not a good that makes a difference for well-being, and that ordinary men and women are incompetent to think about or express their views about what would be the best ordering of political life.

Grimm fears that a world recognizing only those political forms that explicitly join human rights with democracy would delegitimize many states, removing the protection of international law for self-determination. One need only consider the Middle East to observe any number of states that could be condemned for human rights violations. To remove the mantle of international law from states that do not conform to liberal ideas of rights and justice would be to undo a great part of the labor of the twentieth century. While conceding the dangers of unchecked suppression of rights, Grimm finds that international organizations are greater threats to human rights than states themselves, perhaps because they are not accountable to anyone in particular. As Grimm sees it, “democratic principles currently find the best conditions for their realization in the context of the state. The more ambitious the concept of democracy, the less likely it is to be realized beyond the state.” Grimm concludes: “As long as there is no convincing model of global democracy, the source of democratic legitimacy and supervision must not run dry at the state level. Today sovereignty protects democracy” (128).

One cannot help but think Grimm has pointed out a truth, albeit an unpopular one in these days when liberal internationalism as well as other cosmopolitan schools are prevalent. We must wonder, however, what Grimm really means by “democracy,” and whether he uses a helpful or problematic set of categories in trying to locate the political reality that “sovereignty” signifies. By democracy, Grimm seems to have an almost communitarian understanding of politics in which citizens deliberate together about their common life and share a deep-seated conviction about the nature of the common good, the virtues requisite for the pursuit of that good, and a firm belief that it is *their* business, as a community of friends, to deliberate about this good, and not the business of an outsider. Such civic republicanism of course

depends on a firm commitment to the traditional moral virtues of bravery, temperance, prudence, and justice. It also depends on a spirited defense of one's political independence. We know this from classical political science and from the modern republicanism of Rousseau and his followers.

But is it the case that political communities actually possess the conviction that Grimm implies they do? Grimm points out that many political powers that used to be jealously guarded by political communities have indeed been handed over to bureaucratic technocrats, of whom one cannot responsibly assume a genuine care for the common good. Part of modern political theory has been the effort to depoliticize human nature, and in some ways it seems that it has succeeded, at least in the industrialized West. As long as the West continues to think in terms of modern categories—sovereign autonomy belonging to individual states and universal individual rights that require international intervention—it is unclear that any defense of democracy, or of any serious political life, will ever gain much traction. Although Grimm shows sympathy with constitutionalism in some form, and with democratic deliberation about the common good, he does not here offer a comprehensive understanding of politics that allows us to meet the threat of tyranny from unchecked sovereign states and the far darker tyranny threatened by omnipresent international organizations. But that *Sovereignty* raises these questions is evidence of the importance and value of the work of a clearly erudite and clear-thinking mind. Scholars of both international politics and political theory owe much to the work of Dieter Grimm.

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