

# Interpretation

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# Leo Strauss and the Rebirth of Classics in China<sup>1</sup>

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## I

In recent years, there have been continuous calls for the elevation of “national studies”<sup>2</sup> to a primary-level subject<sup>3</sup> within China’s university system. There has also been the claim that this is in keeping with the step of China’s “peaceful rise.” In effect, setting aside the political imagination of “peaceful rise,” the establishment of the classical humanities has always been a foundational concern for any civilization’s education system. The humanities section of primary-level subjects in China’s academia has long been criticized. It is indeed time to thoroughly reconsider the configuration of this system.

“National studies” as a term has existed since ancient times, but its meanings differ. The modern sense of the term appeared at the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) and became popular around the May Fourth Movement (1919). Almost simultaneously, terms such as “Sinology” and “Chinese studies” appeared as distinct from “Western studies.” Conceptualizations such as these are intended to protect China’s humanities tradition from falling apart

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<sup>1</sup> Footnotes enclosed in brackets are by the translator.

<sup>2</sup> [The original Chinese term *guoxue* literally translates as “national studies.” In the Chinese context, it means the study of classical Chinese texts mainly in the humanities. As a concept parallel to that of the Western classics, it has seldom been free from a nationalistic overtone.]

<sup>3</sup> [A primary-level subject is one of the fundamental subjects of study in postgraduate education defined by the Chinese Ministry of Education. These subjects provide a basic structure for Chinese universities to organize their postgraduate education.]

in the face of overwhelming Western influence and to cope with a political crisis unprecedented in Chinese history.

Without exception, concepts like these situate China's humanities crisis against the background of the quarrel between East and West, which suddenly appeared on the horizon. As we know, on one hand, so-called national studies or Chinese studies designate the entire tradition of Chinese scholarship. But on the other hand, the concept of "Western studies" is not the former's exact equivalent. What we in China call "Western studies" in effect denotes the modern scholarship established since the Renaissance but does not necessarily include the Greek and Latin classics. What is hidden here is an issue of crucial importance: Western scholarship contains in itself "the split" or "the quarrel between the ancient and the modern," whereas the term "national studies" means the unbroken tradition of Chinese scholarship. The juxtaposition and contradistinction of national studies and Western studies betray our lack of understanding of that very important split in the West. Most intriguingly, the same lack of understanding was also embedded in the May Fourth Movement's critique of traditional Chinese scholarship.

Let me give two examples. In Zhang Taiyan's<sup>4</sup> *A Critical Discourse on National Classics* and *Brief Notes on National Studies*, "national studies" is treated as a synonym of "national classics," which belongs exclusively to the past, while the equivalent "Western studies" means only "modern" Western scholarship, and carries the connotation of "progress." In this context, the validity of national studies as a scholarship from the past (i.e., nonprogressive) becomes something that constantly requires justification.

Another example: Chinese universities were founded either by Western missionaries or by Chinese following Western models. The core of their organizations invariably consists of practical subjects such as physics, technology, agriculture, medicine, jurisprudence, economics, sociology, and politics. In this sense, Chinese universities are transplants of modern Western universities. Before late Qing, there was no "university" in China. Today, with decades of development, the ideal of late Qing's Self-Strengthening Movement<sup>5</sup> is finally realized—a chair in the academy of science or technology becomes a prerequisite for a university president. But then, where do we find the continuation of traditional Chinese scholarship? A civilization is

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<sup>4</sup> [Zhang Taiyan, or Zhang Binglin (1868–1936), was a leading Chinese philologist, historian, philosopher, and revolutionary.]

<sup>5</sup> [Self-Strengthening Movement (ca. 1861–1895) was a reform program initiated by the Qing government that aimed at adopting Western military technology while explicitly rejecting social reform.]

founded on its language, its literature, and especially its classics. It is true that all Chinese high-school students are required to study (Chinese) language and literature, but its scope is still very limited, with modern literature being the main component. Once in university, students find themselves majoring in more practical subjects, no longer having a chance or obligation to study the classics.

Humanistic education is central to a university. Its core is the historically formed canon of classical texts. But in today's Chinese universities, it plays a rather small role and obviously is no longer the foundation of modern university education. The departments of Chinese language and literature are far smaller in size compared to foreign-language departments devoted to English, French, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish, and so forth. But these languages' histories span no more than five to six hundred years, which makes the underprivileged position of Chinese and the absence of Latin and Greek all the more striking. What's more, these departments have a strong utilitarian rather than literary emphasis. The primary concerns of Chinese universities were, and still are, dictated by international competition. But this should not be the reason for the neglect of humanistic education.

There are two further questions to ask: Where is classical Chinese scholarship? Where is Western classical scholarship?

Today, Chinese "national studies" is divided among the departments of literature, history, and philosophy. But "literature," "history," and "philosophy" are typically Western concepts. This means "national studies" has been restructured according to Western definitions. What is more, these three departments are mostly guided by trendy contemporary Western theories. In the history department, Chinese "national studies" plays the biggest role; but it is precisely in this department that one witnesses the most thorough Westernization, with the recent overwhelming rise of anthropology being the clearest evidence. Even contemporary Confucian studies, the subject closest to the Chinese ethical tradition, cannot help but rely on various modern theories to understand itself. One of the causes for this awkward situation is our lack of a classical perspective, our ignorance of Western classical scholarship and hence of the foundation of modern Western scholarship.

## II

At this point, it is appropriate to turn to an important figure in Western philosophy who has provided answers to many of the questions raised so far.

What makes the topic more significant is that this figure also causes curious resonances in China. Perhaps no other philosopher, both in theory and practice, embodies the historic tension between the ancient and the modern better than Leo Strauss. Before turning to his thought in detail, I want to talk about the introduction of his works to China, a project in which I am personally involved.

Since Yan Fu<sup>6</sup> published his 1898 translation of Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*, China has witnessed three major waves of translation of Western scholarship. The scale increases each time. After the first wave represented by Yan Fu, the second wave came between the May Fourth Movement and 1966, with its major outcome being the translation of the first "politico-juridical canon"—complete works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. At this point, the plan of translating the Western canon according to a Marxist perspective was also outlined. The 1980s saw the third wave of translations, which continues to this day. The canonical works selected by Yan Fu mostly fall within the liberal tradition; translation projects since the May Fourth Movement in general do not deviate from Yan Fu's focus, and go on to broaden Chinese intellectuals' perspective in Western liberalism and the Enlightenment worldview.

In retrospect, it is obvious that each time Western works on political philosophy and law are introduced, controversies arise. This seems to indicate that Chinese intellectuals are strongly opinionated in this regard. Yan Fu, for example, criticized Liang Qichao<sup>7</sup> for translating Jean-Jacques Rousseau; according to Yan, regardless of its merits, it was better not to introduce this kind of thinking.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, the most eye-catching translations—and arguably the most effective politically—are of the Marxist works on political theory, though there are, as always, people who speak against them. It is not difficult to understand the reason for Chinese scholars' discrimination: for them, this is not a purely scholarly endeavor; their major concern behind this project is a crucial and practical problem, namely, how to shape a new China.

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<sup>6</sup> [Yan Fu (1854–1921) was a pioneer in translating modern Western classics. He turned to translation after studying at the Royal Naval College in England and became especially influential for his introduction of Thomas Huxley's writings on evolutionary theory.]

<sup>7</sup> [Liang Qichao (1873–1929) was a prominent scholar who led the constitutional monarch reform movement.]

<sup>8</sup> Cai Lesu, "Yan Fu ju Lusuo yi zai feng Kang, Liang" [Yan Fu implicitly criticizes Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao by rejecting Rousseau], *Modern Chinese History Studies* 5 (1998): 20–39.

Thus it is no surprise that the third wave of translation of Western scholarship in the past two decades has been filled with controversy. For example, I was criticized for introducing Christian theology early on, though it did not cause any major debate. However, around 2000, I started to introduce Carl Schmitt's political jurisprudence and especially Leo Strauss's classical political philosophy, and strong criticisms immediately followed.

Many people, including Western scholars whose attention is not usually directed to China, ask this question: Why did I introduce Strauss?

Faced with this question, I have my own perplexities. In Western universities, Strauss's thought is not a very trendy topic, but the Chinese intellectual community has indeed paid much attention to him. Some scholars have a skeptical or even hostile attitude towards him. This is indeed natural. What baffles me is that, when we introduce more prominent theories by people such as Michel Foucault, John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas, Friedrich Hayek, and Jacques Derrida, I do not hear Western scholars ask why we introduce them; nor have Chinese scholars expressed such a doubtful or fiercely opposing attitude. Why does the relatively less prominent Strauss alone cause such a fuss?

Strauss's theory is named "political philosophy," but so are the more popular theories by the aforementioned writers. The difference is that Strauss's has the attribute "classical," or to be more precise, "Platonic." Therefore, the real problem lies in why this "classical" or "Platonic" attribute sparks such a controversy.

Today, "political philosophy" primarily means a division within philosophy, next to other divisions like ethics, religious studies, aesthetics, and social theory. That is why in universities, the department of political science is placed side by side with those of economics and sociology. This is a new system of taxonomy that has come into being in the modern era, which did not exist in either ancient China or ancient Europe. As early as the 1930s, there were already discussions about Confucius's or Zhuangzi's "political philosophy," which meant that they also had economic thoughts, ethical thoughts, and so on. In Lang Qingxiao's *Zhuangzi Doctrine*, after discussing the authenticity of certain chapters in *Zhuangzi*, the author goes on to talk about Zhuangzi's ontology, philosophy of nature, theory of evolution, philosophy of life, political philosophy, economics, psychology, dialectics, and literary theory. This is evidence of Western thought's dissection and restructuring of classical Chinese scholarship, exactly like what it has done to classical Western scholarship. A comical example would be to try to interpret *Zhuangzi* as a liberal classic.

The more prominent theories by Foucault, Rawls, Habermas, and Derrida are not divisions like political philosophy. Strictly speaking, they are discourses rather than political philosophy. For example, liberalism, conservatism, neoleftism, structuralism, feminism, postcolonialism, and so forth are not subjects in a disciplinary sense, and hence cannot be taxonomized as such. They appear to overlap with ethics, religious studies, aesthetics, sociology, and so on. If we open a current textbook of political philosophy, we are likely to come across such theories. And they all become popular first in the West, then in China. In this sense, Strauss's classical political philosophy seems to be one among them.

However, these discourses are similar to classical political philosophy in appearance only. From a classical point of view, they are not strictly political philosophy, because in the Western tradition, "philosophy" primarily denotes contemplative reflection; even political philosophy has to be contemplative rather than politically practical. No matter how elaborate the philosophy behind these discourses is, they are first of all theories of political practice, and appear intense, realistic, and combative. Looking at them reminds me of Nietzsche's words in the preface to *The Dawn of Day*: "with such a fanatic intention, Kant was just the worthy son of his century, the century that should be called one of fanaticism more than any others."<sup>9</sup> The "century of fanaticism" of course means the Enlightenment eighteenth century. According to Nietzsche, there is an inner spiritual connection between Rousseau, Kant, and Robespierre. Many theories or discourses since the nineteenth century develop along these lines. Indeed, the Enlightenment has been attacked by postmodernist theorists like Foucault and Derrida, but their approaches are none other than a more radical version of Enlightenment itself.

The political philosophy that Strauss advocates emphasizes the classical spirit, which first of all means a fundamental critique of the "fanatic" modern thought (be it conservative, leftist, or liberal). The main reason for introducing Strauss to China is to avoid the century-long fanaticism towards all kinds of modern Western discourses.

Someone might ask: Why avoid? What is wrong with following modern discourses? Is Strauss's political theory not another kind of discourse?

My answer is this: it is improper to call Strauss's political philosophy "Straussism," because a so-called ism has an explicitly practical goal, but

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<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Dawn of Day*, trans. J. M. Kennedy (New York: Macmillan, 1924), 4.

Strauss's classical political philosophy directs students' attention towards the old texts. Even if these students turn to political practice afterwards, they at least know about history and an entire intellectual tradition, understand the teaching of the ancients, and are no longer politically naive. Most modern discourses, on the other hand, believe only in individual experience, and hence more often than not they teach people to be fanatical and naive. In Western academia, especially in America, Strauss is considered by some as a representative of conservatism. Very likely he himself had predicted this, because at the end of his *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, he does stress that "the classics were for almost all practical purposes what now are called conservatives."<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, he singles out "almost all practical purposes" and contradicts it by noting "the contradistinction" between the classical and the conservative.<sup>11</sup> In the end, Strauss's classical principle is critical of all modern discourses, conservatism included. This means that classical political philosophy requires (1) a comprehensive reexamination of modern political philosophy (from Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau, Kant, and Robespierre all the way to Derrida); this inevitably leads to (2) an understanding of the classics through the eyes of the ancients, and on the basis of this understanding, an evaluation of modern political theories by means of a classical standard. Strauss's classical political philosophy is not so prominent in Western academia partly because all kinds of modern discourses have dominated Western universities. On the other hand, if Strauss's classical approach makes radical Chinese scholars uncomfortable, it is likely because they are nurtured by Robespierre's political ideal of "de fonder sur la terre l'empire de la sagesse, de la justice et de la vertu,"<sup>12</sup> which is a typically modern and secular one. To realize this secular vision, we need a secular education-system that shares the same ideal and serves the same purpose. The education system in the West is now well established following this line, with social science being the perfect embodiment of this ideal. But in China, the education system is still relatively malleable. There are still various options to choose from. In this sense, Strauss's classical political theory might play a much more significant role in directing China's university-education reform than in today's West.

According to the empiricist and positivist principle of social science—which is the guiding philosophy of today's education—higher education should teach students to focus not on the great souls in history, but only on

<sup>10</sup> Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958), 298.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, *Dawn of Day*, 5.

the students' own desires and imaginations. Therefore it is no longer mandatory for students to read the classics; they need only explore all varieties of individual desire, memory, and imagination. Then they can become moral people, and go on to critique current social systems. Thanks to modern university education, students now learn to question the classics: why are they inherently good?

Yet is this picture of contemporary higher education not too opinionated? How is it possible that modern thinkers are all wrong save Strauss? This is a good question, and is of the same nature as the one I posed earlier: what is wrong with studying modern theories? These questions are certainly directed toward Strauss himself. And the answer should be found by carefully studying his writings. Strauss was aware of these questions, and had already carefully explicated his answer.

Actually, a concise and straightforward answer can be found in the preface to *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, in which Strauss says that according to "the old-fashioned and simple opinion," Machiavelli "was an evil man," because "only an evil man will stoop to teach maxims of public and private gangsterism."<sup>13</sup> It is not surprising that there are evil people. But it seems rare to have a teacher of evil. Machiavelli is probably the only philosopher that perfectly combines an evil nature and great intellectual skills. In his description, Strauss uses three terms: "evil man," "teacher of evil," and "a unique philosopher."<sup>14</sup> "Teacher" and "philosopher" can be considered synonyms in the sense that philosophers are teachers of the highest order, namely, wise men. Therefore, is it not surprising to see an evil man become a unique philosopher?

Strauss goes on to say that although the old-fashioned opinion has its faults, it nevertheless touches on the most important issue: Machiavelli's teaching is immoral. However, twentieth-century philosophers consider this line of thinking not scholarly enough; they propose "more sophisticated views"<sup>15</sup> to defend Machiavelli. For them, he is not an evil teacher of evil, but rather a "passionate patriot," and also "a scientific student of society." In other words, he is a pioneer in social science, especially in political philosophy. Here Strauss sees an opposition between simple morals and sophisticated, scholarly, and amoral views. For Strauss, even though the old-fashioned, simple morals are not perfect, he still prefers them, because they adhere to

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<sup>13</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–10.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

the fundamental distinction between good and evil. According to Strauss, even if one agrees that Machiavelli is a patriot, one still cannot deny that he is at the same time an evil teacher precisely because of his “indifference to the distinction between right and wrong.” To regard Machiavellian patriotism as moral is to be “blind to that which is higher than patriotism.”<sup>16</sup> As to the opinion that Machiavelli is a scientist who studies society, this is nothing other than saying that the scientific method of sociology should be separated from the moral obligations of people as citizens and human beings. This means “moral obtuseness” should be a precondition of the scientific analysis of society. Since Machiavelli is a philosopher, it is impossible for him to be free of such a “moral obtuseness.”

At the time when Strauss was writing this book, social science was at the height of its power in Western academia. The opening of *Thoughts on Machiavelli* is a critique of the entire Western regime of social science and education, which does not teach the distinction between good and evil. As a result, it is possible that those who have received higher education might not become morally superior to those who haven't; they could even be immoral in a scholarly way. Well aware of criticisms in advance, Strauss still argues that the reason contemporary social scientists champion Machiavelli is that they are his pupils, or their teachers are heirs to the Machiavellian tradition. It is in this sense that Strauss proposes to “recover the pre-modern heritage of the Western world, both Biblical and classical.”<sup>17</sup> Otherwise it is impossible to recognize the evil nature of Machiavelli's thought.

Strauss does draw a lot of fierce criticism, which is not surprising, considering the unpopularity of the “simple and old-fashioned” teachings. But it also proves that many scholars are indeed “pupils” of Machiavelli. In fact, at least in *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Strauss has not yet presupposed that classical thought is good, but he is against the presupposition that classical thought is bad and backward. First of all we need to adopt an unbiased perspective when we look at it. The primary problem with Machiavelli is that he brings about a modern bias and a modern superstition. If a modern perspective has helped us get rid of the superstition of the classics, then today we need to get rid of the superstition of the modern. That is why Strauss reinaugurates the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns. If Strauss wanted to blindly and fanatically encourage a return to the ancients in a conservative manner,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 12.

he would not have taken so much effort to demonstrate the fact that Machiavelli wants to betray the classics in the guise of the classics. He would also not have reminded us that the three major waves of modernity precisely put on the disguise of “returning to the classics.” After all, Strauss never naively proposes a return to the ancients.

Among the diverse topics Strauss has touched upon, his study of Machiavelli occupies a unique place. First of all, this is the longest study of his published during his lifetime, and is arguably the most controversial. Second, Strauss’s thoughts are most thoroughly demonstrated in this book. In my opinion, this book is the most intense in presenting the problems that preoccupy Strauss. In general, it is agreed that Strauss’s major preoccupations include the relationship between philosophy and theological politics, that between revelation and reason, and the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns. It is true that these were all preoccupations of his, but I think none of them is as pointed as this one: Strauss is primarily concerned with the moral degeneration of the philosopher. Strauss never denies Machiavelli’s intellectual brilliance, namely, “the intrepidity of his thought, the grandeur of his vision, and the graceful subtlety of his speech.” But Strauss wants us to remember the “profound theological truth that the devil is a fallen angel.” That is why in Machiavelli’s thought there is “perverted nobility of a very high order.”<sup>18</sup> Strauss demonstrates this through an explanation of Machiavelli’s writings.

This makes me think of a question: What is a Straussian way of reading? Neither close reading nor an eye to esoteric meaning is specifically Straussian; we find them in the works of ancient scholars as well as of Nietzsche, for example. Someone would say a rereading of the classics from the perspective of the relationship between religion and philosophy, or between revelation and reason, is typical of Strauss. But these have always been fundamental questions of the history of Western thought anyway, and we do not need Strauss to remind us of them. In my opinion, the uniqueness of Strauss’s way of reading is to be acutely attentive to the philosopher’s moral-political quality, or the moral-political aspect of philosophy. This is the primary question of political philosophy. “The problem inherent in the surface of things, and only in the surface of things, is the heart of things.”<sup>19</sup> This is Strauss’s famous

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

motto about reading the classics. It is not accidental that it appears at the beginning of the book that criticizes Machiavelli's political morals.

It is precisely from this point that we can understand why Strauss further defines the classical political philosophy as Platonic. The reason has Socrates as its starting point. In the trial of Socrates, the core of the problem is the philosopher's political morality, or the political relationship between the philosopher and his society. The crimes Socrates was charged with included not believing in the gods of the city and corrupting the youth. Ever since the trial of Socrates, whether the philosopher corrupts the youth becomes an ever-present moral-political problem. However, since Machiavelli, philosophers gradually become social scientists or intellectuals. It follows that the right to charge a philosopher of moral crimes is abolished. Thus one is free of moral-political obligations as long as one is "scientifically studying society." Strauss sees clearly that Machiavelli tries to look at politics only from a political perspective, canceling the moral-religious dimension.

Platonic philosophers, on the other hand, require that one looks at politics from the moral-religious perspective; this is a result of the lesson one learns from the trial of Socrates: from the moral-political point of view, Athenian citizens are completely right to charge Socrates. In this sense, Platonic philosophy is nothing other than a different kind of Enlightenment teaching for the few wise ones instead of the common majority. This is the exact opposite of Machiavelli's modern Enlightenment teaching for the masses. That is why Strauss states that "we shall have to consider whether that Enlightenment deserves its name or whether its true name is Obfuscation."<sup>20</sup> Through the political philosophy and liberal education he advocates, Strauss endeavors to reestablish such a Platonic enlightenment philosophy, whose more recent advocates named by Strauss include Jonathan Swift and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. What do these two people have to do with conservatism or the extreme Right? Who would think that Swift is conservative, or that Lessing is extreme Right? Around the age of thirty, Strauss has already firmly adopted a position that transcends both liberalism and conservatism. At the end of a 1931 lecture entitled "Cohen and Maimonides," he announces his quest for "a horizon beyond the opposition progress/conservatism, Left/Right, Enlightenment/Romanticism, or however one wants to designate this opposition. . . [and an understanding of] the idea of the *eternal* good, the *eternal* order, free

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 173.

from all regard for progress or regress.”<sup>21</sup> Correspondingly, at the very beginning of his preface to *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*, Strauss observes that “the man [in this case Hitler] with the strongest will or single-mindedness, the greatest ruthlessness, daring, and power over his following, and the best judgment about the strength of the various forces in the immediately relevant political field was the leader of the revolution.”<sup>22</sup> Are these not all precious qualities in political practice? Unfortunately, they are married to those base souls that do not care about common sense and morality.

Certain intellectuals in today’s China have to decide whether to follow the modern Western Enlightenment or the classical path of Platonic enlightenment. And here lies the second reason for my introducing Strauss: we should maintain a cautious attitude towards the philosophical basis of the Western humanities since the beginning of modern times. The classical teaching advocated by Strauss provides us with an opportunity to do so. Classical teaching requires that we learn from great souls of the past, which are embodied in the classics passed down to us. The distinction between good and evil has to be based upon certain moral principles. This is an idea shared by both Chinese and Western civilizations. But modern social science abolishes these principles, and establishes a different, secular principle. Now we need to retrieve the classical principles to restore the moral-political quality of modern scholarship. Since Chinese universities are still developing, it is the perfect time to advance Strauss’s idea of classical education.

### III

Since the nineteen-eighties, Chinese intellectuals have been striving to break through communist ideological confinements. Well into the nineties, Enlightenment liberalism and its related modern and postmodern theories were still the mainstream. This was a natural reaction against the previous ideological domination. Then come the neoleftists who, in the eyes of the liberals, are trying to resurrect the old communist ideology. When classical political philosophy is introduced, the liberals sense a bigger, more fundamental threat, but this time it is impossible to associate the new enemy with the old ideology. It is not surprising that the introduction of Strauss to China has been greeted with an angry attack, because the attack comes from

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<sup>21</sup> Leo Strauss, “Cohen and Maimonides,” in *Leo Strauss on Maimonides: The Complete Writings*, ed. Kenneth Hart Green (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 222.

<sup>22</sup> Leo Strauss, *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*, trans. E. M. Sinclair (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), 1.

those holding a modern, Enlightenment position, while Strauss's criticism is directed precisely against Enlightenment. Today, the legitimacy of Enlightenment, democracy, and liberalism becomes absolutely unchallengeable. But what Strauss tried to do is to reopen the case concerning the quality of these ideas. By reintroducing the perspective of classical political philosophy, Strauss reminds us that the attitude towards democracy and a universal enlightenment was already an extremely important subject of debate in classical Greek political philosophy. Reviewing ancient thought enables us to cautiously reconsider various political problems.

According to Strauss, liberalism in its classical sense pursues virtue.<sup>23</sup> It follows that Machiavelli, by pursuing vice rather than virtue, becomes the true enemy of classical liberalism. But a leading figure in liberalism, Isaiah Berlin, considers Machiavelli to be someone who provided the bases of liberalism.<sup>24</sup> Liberal philosopher Quentin Skinner accuses Strauss of being “a hanging judge” rather than the “recording angel” one expects in a historian.<sup>25</sup> To unravel these arguments, let us look at one example from Strauss's writings. How does Machiavelli become a pioneer in modern democracy, and why? So explains Strauss: Machiavelli opposes the entire Western classical tradition and “the common opinion” held by classical thinkers about “the wisdom and the constancy of the multitude.”<sup>26</sup> Opposing attitudes toward this very “wisdom and the constancy of the multitude” lie at the heart of the quarrel between the ancient and the modern. Ancient ideas are based on the common opinion, whereas modern ideas are based on a universal opinion. According to Machiavelli, the multitude has more wisdom and constancy than princes as individuals. He goes on to call the voices of the multitude “a universal opinion” and even compares it to “the voice of god.”<sup>27</sup> In this context, the word “universal” implies a philosophical superiority over “common” wisdom. Machiavelli's modern attack on the ancients is none other than advocating philosophy against moral common opinion. Therefore, Strauss calls Machiavelli “the first philosopher” to challenge the bias toward a regime of virtue in the name of the multitude and democracy. In this formulation, there are two points worth our attention: first, democracy is nothing other

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<sup>23</sup> Leo Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 4.

<sup>24</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “The Originality of Machiavelli,” in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 99.

<sup>25</sup> Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 99.

<sup>26</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 127.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

than the rule of the multitude; second, classical philosophy promotes a virtuous regime and presents its preconditions. The Confucian tradition advocates a similar virtuous regime, and the attempt to find democratic tendencies in Confucianism is destined to fail.

Let us further consider Machiavelli's intention. According to him, the purpose of the people is more honest and just than the purpose of the great. It should be noted that in Strauss's wording, "the multitude" now becomes "the people," and "the prince" now becomes "the great." Is Strauss randomly changing his wording? Of course not. He is returning the concepts to their classical sense. According to the ancients, the prince should be the great: in Aristotle's words, the prince "must possess not only virtue but also capacity that will render him capable of action."<sup>28</sup> Another shift of wording is the substitution of "the wisdom and the constancy" with "honest or just." Thus moral qualities replace philosophical ones.

But Strauss goes on to argue that Machiavelli does not really support the rule of the multitude, because he is well aware that "all simple regimes are bad; every so-called democracy is in fact an oligarchy unless it verges on anarchy."<sup>29</sup> So why does Machiavelli still advocate democracy? Is this not contradictory? How do we explain that while well aware of the disadvantage of democracy, Machiavelli still promotes it? Strauss's answer is that Machiavelli's "bias in favor of the multitude enabled or compelled him not to identify himself simply with" the virtuous regime of the classical tradition. Perhaps we would think that this explanation is too simplistic and too common. But indeed Strauss does not resort to profound philosophy, but adheres to common sense: as we know from our experience, there are people who do things that they know are not good. This is due to their disposition; there is not much reason about it.

However, there is an important condition in Strauss's argument: Machiavelli is a philosopher. One of the classical meanings of being a philosopher is to be able to have command over one's own disposition; otherwise he or she cannot be a "free person."<sup>30</sup> Since Machiavelli is no longer able to have command over his own disposition, his quality as a philosopher is already corrupted. The corruption of the philosopher's quality is at the core of the symptom of modernity. Nietzsche is well aware of this problem. The reason

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<sup>28</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1325b10–14.

<sup>29</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 127.

<sup>30</sup> Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.

he is fiercely against Rousseau is that he thinks the latter breaks down the difference between noble philosophers and commoners. Such an effort of equalization renders the establishment of moral order in politics impossible. This is the reason why modern political systems continue to produce radical democratic appeals. The change that Machiavelli brings about is that one does not begin with the high and try to elevate the low, but starts from the low and drags the high down. *The Prince* uses various examples from antiquity, one of which is the speculative dialogue that Philopoemen and friends engage in. This is precisely a Socratic method. But what Machiavelli makes his characters discuss are not problems about truth, good, or beauty, but practical, strategic, and instrumental issues such as how to deal with enemies occupying a superior position, and his goal is to drag them down (see *The Prince*, chap. XIV). In classical political philosophy, the discussion about the political regime is associated with a distinction between different types of souls. Machiavelli does not ignore this issue, but he denies the careful comparison of types of souls. He simplifies souls into merely two types, the idea oriented and the practice oriented. He then dismisses the former in favor of the latter. More importantly, by dismissing the idea-oriented soul, we no longer have any moral standard to measure the practice-oriented souls. This becomes a fundamental orientation of modern scholarship.

To realize the political ideal of equalization, modern political theory not only adopts a secular outlook but also reconstructs philosophy from the perspective of the low. From such a new philosophy it proceeds to create rational principles to reform the empirical world. Modern humanistic education is based on this philosophy. In the modern world, the democratic proliferation of philosophy and all kinds of theories is for the same purpose of equalization. But then what we have is no longer philosophy.

#### IV

The Enlightenment ideal of equalization brings China out of the archaic confinement of “celestial empire” ideology into the Western world of universal values. This is the Enlightenment’s great contribution to China. But those “enlightened” Chinese thinkers have to answer some fundamental questions: What is China’s own ethical identity? What is the relationship between the Chinese Tao and the Western Tao? These are fundamental questions that have preoccupied Chinese intellectuals since the late imperial period. The relationship between Marxism and traditional Chinese values in the age of

globalization is one among many examples. And here lies the third reason for my introducing Strauss: his classical political philosophy reminds us that for the past hundred years, what the Chinese Tao has been faced with is merely the modern Tao of the West, rather than the classical one. It helps us to revise our habit of measuring classical Chinese thinking against the modern Western one, and frees us from the “fanatic” political imaginations of modern Western humanistic systems.

Perhaps someone would argue that using Strauss’s theory to explain Chinese classics again falls into the trap of the West’s theoretical colonization. This is not true, because Strauss does not have a theory of his own to interpret the classics. He encourages us only to read the classics with a classical perspective. Therefore, if we learn a set of methods from Strauss, they are actually methods of the ancients rather than Strauss’s own. In this sense, Strauss’s classical political philosophy differs from most Western theories introduced to China: it is not a theory, nor a *nuova scienza*, but rather an orientation, or more precisely, a classical disposition. The introduction of Strauss to China should be a meeting of the classical minds. For three hundreds years in the West, and for over a hundred years in China, this classical spirit has been in exile, losing its place in academia. Today, this spirit is striving to regain its home within the postmodern university system.

It is in this sense that the introduction of Strauss to China should serve as an inspiration for the reestablishment of classical scholarship in China. This is also the reason why our model is not the department of classics found in Western universities. Nietzsche argues that we should retain the tension between the ancient and the modern, and balance the modern elements of the humanities through classical education, because

in comparison with the mode of life which prevailed among men for thousands of years, we men of the present day are living in a very immoral age: the power of custom has been weakened to a remarkable degree, and the sense of morality is so refined and elevated that we might almost describe it as volatilized. That is why we latecomers experience such difficulty in obtaining a fundamental conception of the origin of morality: and even if we do obtain it, our words of explanation stick in our throats, so coarse would they sound if we uttered them!<sup>31</sup>

However, for the past century, scholars have concentrated only on Nietzsche’s theory of the *Übermensch*, ignoring his teachings on the classics. In fact, in Western academia, the ancient Greek and Latin scholarship is to a certain

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<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche, *Dawn of Day*, 14.

extent confined to the department of classics, losing its connection to the present. What's more, after the rise of modern anthropology and linguistics, the essence of the classics may have been missed: "For so great is the conceit of our classical teachers, who would almost make it appear that they had gained full control over the ancients, that they pass on this conceit to their pupils, together with the suspicion that such a possession is of little use for making people happy, but is good enough for honest, foolish old bookworms."<sup>32</sup> The liveliest example of classical scholarship is to be found in America. However, it is not in the department of classics, but rather in the transdisciplinary college of liberal arts and its general-education program. This means that classical scholarship must transcend the narrow domain that the modern academic system has assigned to it, strive to become the foundational subject of modern humanities education, and regain its connection with the present. The purpose of a universal classical education is not to train more PhDs in classics, but to provide humanities and social science with good students.

Therefore, we should not simply copy Western universities' departments of classics. Our classical studies should take the Chinese classical tradition as its basis, and eliminate the boundaries between literature, history, and philosophy. Its subject should include both Chinese and Western classics. It should have a place in undergraduate education. On the other hand, we also need to establish classical civilization as a primary-level subject, with its own department. Under this umbrella, Chinese, Greek-Latin, Judeo-Christian, and Indian civilizations are secondary-level subjects.

For over a century, Chinese intellectuals have pursued a variety of trends in Western philosophy. Pragmatism was much sought after in the thirties, but no trace of its academic popularity remains today. In the eighties, existentialism became extremely popular, but now it has passed its prime. In the present, Western philosophy in Chinese academia is dominated by phenomenology, analytic philosophy, hermeneutics, and deconstructionism, all of which have their foundations in Enlightenment thought. In contrast, Strauss's political philosophy is based on the Platonic tradition, and weaves into itself the entire history of Western thought. His scholarly works are mostly interpretations of writings of the past, or introductory pieces that important professors do not care to write; he did not offer his own system or theory; he was low key and unassuming. He taught at the University of Chicago for almost two decades, during which time several Chinese students

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

studied there. But none of them mentioned to me that Strauss had any influence on them. In fact, his political philosophy was developed less than ten years after Heidegger's phenomenology, and much earlier than Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics, let alone Derrida's deconstructionism. Already in the eighties, hermeneutics was very influential in China. After all, *Truth and Method* is theoretically elaborated and convenient to use. But owing to its relatively low popularity, Strauss's thought entered Chinese academia very late, even later than deconstructionism. Part of his foundational text "What Is Political Philosophy?" was translated into Chinese in the eighties, but at that time no one noticed its profound significance.

After Strauss's passing in the early seventies, it turned out that his scholarship had changed the course of the Anglo-American study of classics; the positivist-historicist school in classics has been seriously undermined. Since the end of last century, the debates caused by Strauss's posthumous influence have been heavily politicized: the liberals accuse Strauss of harboring hostility towards liberalism and democracy, and of being a politically reactionary godfather of conservatism. For example, in 1963, five years after the publication of *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Robert J. McShea published an article entitled "Leo Strauss on Machiavelli" in *Political Research Quarterly*, claiming that "Strauss is not merely an admirer of classical thought. He actually desires a return to the type of society envisaged by Plato and Cicero, a society seen as hierarchical or aristocratic, conservative, and endowed with a state religion."<sup>33</sup>

Such politicized debates in American academia soon spread to China, causing no small crisis. In China, state media often accuse "Western capitalist liberalism" of causing confusions and crises. Interestingly, now it is the liberals who are worried about confusions and crises. This at least demonstrates one thing: that various modern discourses have obscured the vision of our academia. It is no wonder that, upholding the perspectives of these discourses, we are not able to see the permanent qualities of Strauss's answer to the century-old question, namely, that of the root of Western civilization's crisis. His strategy is to go back to classical works of political philosophy. He revives the problematization of the trial of Socrates. He urges intellectuals to confront the fundamental ethical problem before tackling the academic one.

Strauss's teaching aims at introducing generations of students to the Platonic philosophical tradition, helping them to find an ultimate reference point in the classics. Once the classics become the foundation of a country's

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<sup>33</sup> *Political Research Quarterly* 16 (1963): 787.

scholarship, prominence will no longer be given to Strauss, but to the classics themselves. Therefore, we are mistaken if we try to glean certain doctrines from Strauss. Whether Strauss has some esoteric teaching to share, and what it is, concern us little. His serious attitude towards the classical texts and his pursuit of true political-philosophical problems place him among the great minds of history. Under the guidance of this philosophy, young scholars' intellectual passion can be seasoned through immersion in the classics. This will then enable them to understand the seriousness and complexity of political life, and to avoid naively pursuing any political claims propagated by the media. Today, the crisis of Chinese civilization is already tied to that of the West. Strauss's teaching inspires us to move beyond liberalism, conservatism, neoleftism, and postmodernism when dealing with this crisis.



## Nietzsche's Politics of Writing: Some Preliminary Considerations on *Beyond Good and Evil*

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Nietzsche regarded himself first and foremost as a writer of books.<sup>1</sup> After a long period in which scholarship treated the posthumous fragments as equally valid or even privileged sources for the reconstruction of his teaching, several book-length studies and collections have been published in the past few years on *Beyond Good and Evil* alone. This fact seems to attest a willingness to approach Nietzsche more in keeping with his own self-understanding. It seems not to be entirely coincidental that this book, in particular, has time and again elicited more sustained scholarly efforts. By common standards it must, indeed, appear to be Nietzsche's most encompassing work as it covers all major philosophical topics. Moreover, it is a rhetorical masterpiece, the intensity and brilliance of which only the fewest seem able to resist.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the splendor of its style and its carefully elaborated composition exert a compelling fascination which is perhaps only occasionally marred by a certain

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Some of these considerations go back to a seminar on *Beyond Good and Evil* which I taught at the University of Munich in the winter of 2013/14. I would like to thank Dr. Mingfeng Yu for the fruitful discussions we had in the wake of this seminar. My deepest gratitude is due to Prof. Dr. Heinrich Meier, whose seminars on Nietzsche occasioned not a few "ecstasies of learning."

<sup>1</sup> See the title of the third chapter of *Ecce Homo*: "Why I Write Such Good Books." For Nietzsche's works, I have used *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980), hereafter KSA. I have made free use of an early translation by Helen Zimmern, republished by Dover (Mineola, NY, 1997), and of the more recent translation by R. J. Hollingdale, which appeared in the Penguin series (London, 2003). In what follows references will be by section to *Beyond Good and Evil* unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Most of the contributions to *Texturen des Denkens: Nietzsches Inszenierung der Philosophie in "Jenseits von Gut und Böse"*, ed. Marcus Andreas Born and Axel Pichler (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), while focusing on Nietzsche's rhetorical strategies, fail to ask what purpose they are meant to serve.

political tendency, no longer wholly in keeping with contemporary taste. It thus comes as no surprise that in more recent studies the political dimension of the work receives rather little attention, if it is not overlooked altogether or maybe even deliberately ignored. Instead, Nietzsche's critique of morality is generally considered to constitute the core of the book and of his teaching as such. According to a still widespread view Nietzsche's critique, in the sense of a negative evaluation and finally a resolute rejection of especially Christian morality, would aim at introducing and establishing a new type of morality which could be designated as a noble morality or a morality for the noble man. This line of interpretation rests on an equation of Christian morality with herd morality and of noble morality with an individualistic morality. Nietzsche, therefore, is often seen as the representative of a most extreme individualism.

One might wonder whether or not such judgments do not tend to obfuscate one of Nietzsche's fundamental insights (cf. Sect. 202). For one thing, they seem to neglect the fact that Nietzsche considered the concept of an individual morality or of a set of moral rules oriented towards the good of the individual to imply a *contradictio in adjecto*. He presents at least two reasons for this view. First, any set of moral rules is bound to generalize. It must abstract from substantial particular circumstances. By its form alone, it ignores the individual in his singularity and addresses him solely in the abstract or as a member of a group. Second, any set of moral rules, by its form alone, implies an unconditional claim which is at odds with the necessity to adapt to changing particular circumstances. If the way of life of the individual, if the question about the good for the individual, should become the theme of philosophical investigation, it could not in any way be articulated in the form of a set of moral rules or of a "morality." To speak of an "individualistic morality" would therefore be meaningless. The addressee of any morality can be the individual only insofar as he belongs to a certain group, even if it be humanity as such. Morality is thus, by its very essence, oriented to what is considered to be a common good, the good of a certain community, and can be said to comprise exclusively social, civil, or political virtues (cf. Sect. 198; Sect. 188 *in fine*).

If this is the case, then *any* morality would be, by itself, what Nietzsche calls "herd morality." In fact, for Nietzsche the highly derogatory word "herd" stands for any kind of community or society: it points to man as a

social being (Sect. 199).<sup>3</sup> The expression “herd morality” is thus pleonastic. The principle of herd morality, or of morality as such, is common utility, or at least what is considered to be a common good. The conception of the common good is adapted to the particular conditions of the community. As long as a community or society is not stabilized, as long as it is threatened in its existence by external enemies, qualities such as vengefulness, ambition, courage, spirit of enterprise, and rapacity are particularly valued and therefore labeled “virtues,” because they display a willingness to devote oneself to the well-being of the community. These same virtues, which pertain to what Nietzsche elsewhere labels master morality or the morality of nobility, are not to be considered to be less part of a herd morality than those that are highly valued in a so-called slave morality. Only in a more advanced state of society, in which the immediate threat by external enemies has diminished, do the former virtues become superfluous or even dangerous for the stability of society, and therefore come to be negatively valued (Sect. 201).

In the section under discussion, Nietzsche presents a diachronic scheme of the development of herd morality. Different stages of the development of a society require different virtues. What is presented here diachronically also allows for a translation to a synchronic scheme. In particular, one is entitled to wonder whether the disappearance of external enemies is not a most unlikely and exceptional occurrence. Moreover, those virtues that are assigned to that state of society where external enemies have disappeared (public spirit, benevolence, consideration, industriousness, moderation, modesty, forbearance, pity; Sect. 199) seem to be equally indispensable in that earlier state. The different classes of virtues thus seem to be assigned not so much to different stages of society as to different classes within society. More precisely, the relations towards those belonging to this society and towards those not belonging to it necessitate different lines of conduct. The orientation towards the common good thus simultaneously prescribes different types of “virtue.” In a later, more famous section Nietzsche does, in fact, supplement the diachronic with a synchronic presentation (Sect. 260).<sup>4</sup> Already his definition

<sup>3</sup> See Sect. 199, where “human herds” is explained as standing for any kind of “family groups, communities, tribes, nations, states, churches.”

<sup>4</sup> It is to be noted that the diachronic presentation is to be found near the end of the fifth chapter, whereas the synchronic presentation is deferred until the beginning of the ninth chapter. While each chapter opens with a kind of introductory section (Sect. 1, 24, 45, 186, 204, 214, 240; cf. 25, 241), the ninth chapter begins abruptly *in medias res* with a very provocative thesis, thereby hinting at the fact that it merely continues the fifth chapter. By mentioning that the second half of the fifth chapter treated only one chapter of “the natural history of morals,” namely, the chapter “Morality as Timidity” (Sect. 197, 198), Nietzsche gives us to understand that he is abstracting here from another, equally

of “psychology” comprises a synchronic view in the form of a “morphology” or typology of will to power as well as a diachronic view which aims to show how different types might develop, one from the other, or in which succession they can at least be thought (Sect. 23). In the synchronic presentation the two main types of morality are not considered as belonging to different stages of a given society, but rather as characteristic of different classes of people within a given society, while abstracting from the question of how this social structure, with its clearly determined functions (masters and slaves) has come about. For this reason the expressions of master and slave morality are not introduced until this section. Both classes are distinguished by their own characteristic type of morality. It should be remarked that the designation “masters” and “slaves” implies different functions within a social order. Translated into a more neutral language,<sup>5</sup> one can say that the “masters” stand for the ruling class of a given society, the “slaves” for the class of the subjects. These designations make clear once again that Nietzsche has in view here social and civil virtues. Each member of society, owing to its position within the social order, has certain virtues. This contention can be read in a double way. First, it might point to the fact that, owing to his position within the social order, a member of society has different duties and therefore different dispositions which will be considered to be laudable or reprehensible. Such qualities which for a member of the ruling class might be considered laudable or indispensable, might prove to be dangerous for the stability of the whole if they appear to be overdeveloped by members belonging to the class of the subjects. Second, it might also point to the fact that every individual develops a certain type of virtues, qualities, or dispositions, owing to the class into which he happens to be born. Briefly put, to be a good ruler requires a set of qualities or virtues different from those required to be a good subject. We can say that the masters and the slaves are the prime addressees of the respective type of morality.

As Nietzsche makes clear, the distinction between the ruling class and the class of the subjects is coeval with society. While it may be conceivable

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important “chapter” which is supplemented in the ninth chapter. This also directs our attention to the fact that the intermediate chapters (sixth to eighth) are, as it were, pushed in between the two halves of the chapter on the natural history of morality. These three chapters constitute the counterpart to the second chapter, which was equally pushed in between the first chapter—which in its final section promised to treat of psychology—and the third chapter, which gives us a first specimen of this new type of psychology.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout the book Nietzsche generally uses a very moralizing, highly connotative terminology. Special attention should therefore be given to such (rare) passages, where he himself hints at the possibility of translating this judgmental language into a more neutral language (e.g., Sect. 199, 242).

to pursue the abolition of master morality, it is impossible to dispense with the function to which it corresponds (Sect. 199). A sound society thus needs both types of virtue, distributed to the different classes. Both types of morality must, however, take the form of a general and unconditional claim. They will *both* present themselves as being morality itself (cf. Sect. 202). As the two sets of “virtues” contradict each other, each implies of itself a negative valuation of the opposite set. Insofar as each set forms the basis of a collective identity, it will entail contempt for the subjects by the ruling class and fear or even hatred of the ruling class by the subjects. The two sets thus give rise to an insurmountable dissension within the body of society. Both sets of “virtues” and both classes are equally indispensable for any sound and stable society. At the same time, they put a society into a permanent state of tension. Thinking through the “problem of morality,” that is, the problem morality is meant to solve, namely, the establishment of a relatively stable society, thus leads to the insight of “morality as a problem,” that is, the fact that morality by its very nature cannot possibly solve the initial problem that gave rise to it (Sect. 186).<sup>6</sup>

These preliminary remarks must for the moment suffice. They aim at casting some doubt on the common practice of downplaying the political dimension of *Beyond Good and Evil* and of bringing the problem of morality into the fore instead. The said practice conflicts with Nietzsche's professed aim to identify “morality” with “politics” or “moral” with “political virtues.”<sup>7</sup> To distinguish “morality” and “politics,” one must assume a fundamental difference between the individual qua individual as the prime addressee and object of “morality” and the individual qua social being as the prime addressee and object of “politics,” a distinction to which Nietzsche refuses to subscribe. The common line of interpretation seems, however, to be supported by Nietzsche's alleged aim to introduce, promote, and establish a new type of morality, a morality of nobility.<sup>8</sup> That this is Nietzsche's actual intention is

<sup>6</sup> The “problem of morality,” or the problem that morality is meant to solve, consists in the establishment of a kind of order and hierarchy in the chaos of drives, without which man is not viable (cf. Sect. 6, 19, 188); to be more exact, the problem concerns the question of the good life. This requires entry into the social state. “Morality as a problem” means that this solution of the “problem of morality” requires a plurality of “moralities.” See Sect. 186.

<sup>7</sup> In a casual remark Nietzsche explicitly equates both: he assigns to the “philosophical laborers” the task of “formalizing” “former *determinations* of value, creations of value which have become prevalent,” “whether in the realm of the *logical*, the *political* (moral), or the *artistic*” (Sect. 211). Such a casual and unique remark merely confirms the conclusion one arrives at by thinking through Nietzsche's more extended analyses.

<sup>8</sup> For this view see Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task: An Interpretation of "Beyond Good and Evil"* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001) and J. Harvey Lomax, *The Paradox of Philosophical Education: Nietzsche's New Nobility and the Eternal Recurrence in "Beyond Good and Evil"* (Lanham,

at least suggested by the overall structure of the book, as it can be inferred from the chapter headings: Starting with a radical critique of all philosophers hitherto, who appear to have fallen victim to unquestioned moral prejudices, the critical analysis of morality culminates in a chapter that promises to treat “the noble.”<sup>9</sup> The “noble,” or as it is more often called, “aristocratic” morality, is usually taken to be extremely individualistic. If we should have to consider it to be an attempt to restore or rehabilitate master morality, this assessment might already seem problematic, as master morality proved to be one version of “herd morality.” In the diachronic presentation, Nietzsche showed how it originates in *fear*, namely of external enemies (Sect. 201). In the ninth chapter, Nietzsche offers an important supplement to this analysis: Master morality is determined not only by relations to external enemies, which are characterized by a mixture of fear and reverence, and relations to the subjects, which are characterized by contempt, but likewise by relations to the other members of the ruling class. The master, or the noble man, wants to be appreciated by his equals. The conscience of the noble man is an expression of the conscience or the self-consciousness of his class.<sup>10</sup> His self-regard depends on the regard of his equals. As a morality of honor the morality of nobility

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MD: Lexington Books, 2003): “Nietzsche overthrows the philosophers of old *not out of uncorrupted love of truth but for the sake of a morality* towards which his entire teaching is directed.... Since reason does not occupy the core of his being, the philosopher is guided by a ‘morality’ grounded only in the fortuitous order of rank of his instinctive desires, not in truth” (Lomax, *Paradox*, 6; emphasis added). This view is also advanced in what is, to my knowledge, the first monograph devoted exclusively to *Beyond Good and Evil*: Paul van Tongeren, *Die Moral von Nietzsches Moralkritik: Studie zu “Jenseits von Gut und Böse”* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1989). The author is, however, well aware of the problematic character of this aim, insofar as Nietzsche aims at imposing this morality by appealing to affectivity rather than to rational arguments. The morality of nobility is based, ultimately, on belief or faith. Cf. Sect. 287.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Lomax, *Paradox of Philosophical Education*, 12; Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Task*, 3–4, 7, 262–64 and *passim*. This apparent curve from a beginning over the middle (means) to a clear end (goal) forms part of Nietzsche’s intention. The fundamental structure of the book, however, deviates considerably from the surface structure. See notes 4 and 28.

<sup>10</sup> It might at first surprise to speak of “conscience” with respect to the masters or the noble men, as in the *Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche seems to trace the origin of conscience to slave morality. It should be noted, however, that the discussion there only concerns the origin of *bad* conscience (as a prerequisite for self-knowledge or “self-vivisection”). Nietzsche’s use of the word “conscience” is indeed not limited to “bad conscience.” It does not seem to be pressing the text to speak of “conscience” with respect to the masters and the noble men, if one considers the part shame and pride play in their self-understanding and in the understanding of the moral significance of their deeds and intentions. The distinction between master and slave morality seems indeed to be coeval with the distinction between two kinds or forms of “conscience” or with the distinction between a morality of honor and a morality of guilt. The contribution of bad conscience to the will to truth and the possibly impeding role played by the good conscience should, moreover, not be overlooked. Cf. Sect. 16, 31, 33, 212, 58, 188, 208. As he submits his hypothesis of will to power for consideration, Nietzsche appeals to the intellectual or scientific conscience (Sect. 13, 36).

can be said to be founded on shame and pride. Nietzsche seems to suggest that both shame and pride point to *vanity* as the real core of the morality of nobility as they both imply a fundamental dependence on the opinions and the judgment of others.

One might, of course, object that, according to Nietzsche, vanity is most alien to the noble man. In fact, he says that “vanity is one of the things which a noble man perhaps finds hardest to understand: He will be tempted to deny its existence, whereas a different type of human being will think it palpably evident” (Sect. 261).<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche thus does not deny that the noble man is capable of vanity; he merely states that the noble man is little predisposed to a genuine understanding of vanity as a motive for human action and to recognizing it in others or in himself. Instead, he is tempted to argue it away. Nietzsche offers us some samples of this typical way of reasoning. The noble man is predisposed to reinterpret typical trains of thinking that for common understanding seem undeniably to manifest vanity, so as to make them appear as not stemming from vanity. Looked at soberly, these reasonings do, in fact, exhibit vanity, whereas the noble man tries to deny that they do. One can thus say that it is his own vanity that leads the noble man to deny its existence, and so to distort the facts. He is unconscious of his own vanity; he is not able to see to what extent his own self-regard is dependent on being appreciated by others, especially by those he considers to be his equals. Vanity unconscious of itself seems to be the more extreme form of vanity. The most extreme form of vanity might be found in a type of man who believes himself to be propounding the most original and deepest philosophical insights, without noticing that he is delivering only the crudest trivialities or repeating some generally accepted opinions that he can consider to be “plausible” arguments only because he never even thought of doubting them. While deriving his self-regard from his superiority to the slaves or the ignoble, the noble man is constantly conforming to the opinions of his alleged equals. He does not derive his opinion of himself from the fact that he acted in conformity with certain objective rules or with the law. Acting in accordance with the law or deriving one’s opinion of oneself from the fact that one has acted in

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<sup>11</sup> Van Tongeren reads this statement as meaning that “vanity is most alien to the noble man” (*Die Moral von Nietzsches Moralkritik*, 229). Lampert states: “Nietzsche denies that nobility is vanity,” and adds: “If vanity is the attempt to create a good opinion of oneself that one does not have and to believe that opinion when it is reflected back by the other, then vanity is a slavish condition, subjection to the opinion of the other. The noble man, by contrast, confers his own worth on himself, demanding that others share it” (*Nietzsche’s Task*, 271). Douglas Burnham likewise summarizes: “The noble human finds vanity . . . inconceivable” (*Reading Nietzsche: An Analysis of “Beyond Good and Evil”* [Stocksfield, UK: Acumen, 2007], 200).

accordance with the law might be a possible way of becoming independent of the opinion of others.<sup>12</sup>

To uncover vanity as the core of noble morality is to assert that noble morality is founded on self-delusion. If Nietzsche aims at introducing and establishing a morality of nobility, he can thus count on the power of vanity for his plan to be successful. The noble morality promotes a feeling of superiority over, and with this a feeling of contempt for, those whom it considers to be inferior. This does not alter the fact that these affects are highly social and mediated by the opinions of others. There is, then, an insoluble contradiction at the core of this morality: exactly insofar as persons are governed, in their actions and in their self-understanding, by the belief that they are highly individual, they are at the same time acting on the basis of and seeing the world through social standards of which they are not even conscious. This contradiction is the exact reverse of the contradiction implied in a morality based on compassion (cf. Sect. 194). Both kinds of morality are based on a fundamental delusion.

The above considerations, which could easily be expanded, are intended to point out some seemingly harmless, because at first glance self-evident, assumptions which, as I believe, to a very great extent still determine the most common understanding of *Beyond Good and Evil*. One cannot, however, dismiss them as being mere misunderstandings, as they seem to be suggested by the text itself. They indeed seem to grasp the main tendency of the book as it is understood by the average reader. Maybe one can say that Nietzsche intended to be understood in this way by the majority of his readers. As this majority may still comprise a great variety of readers, the book could contribute to a more proper self-understanding of these different natures as it might alert each to his particular nature, if it does not even, for better or for worse, rouse them from a state of dormancy. The spirited and fervent tone of the book at least seems to call for an equally personal response. Some small details, casual remarks, easily overlooked shifts in terminology, and even unremarkable elucidations in parentheses, however, do not seem to fit into the general picture. A subterranean—the properly philosophical—layer seems to be overlaid with a general and predominant polemical, moralistic layer. Once one becomes attentive to such details, one might gain the kind of experiences Nietzsche himself hints at in the book. For instance, when remarking that the general reader “takes about five words in twenty haphazardly and ‘conjectures’ their

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<sup>12</sup> This is not the place to analyze the function of the question of vanity for the analysis of conscience (or of “taste,” as Nietzsche often calls it).

probable meaning" (Sect. 192), he might in passing be giving a warning to his reader. One can safely assume that Nietzsche, indeed, had expected to be read in this way, though it may not have been the way in which he desired to be read by all. More precisely, it might not be the adequate way of reading, if one desires to understand Nietzsche as he intended to be understood. At the same time, Nietzsche's remark might make the reader conscious of the way the reader usually reads. To take another example: when Nietzsche mentions how a "happily preserved *petit fait*," some almost imperceptible detail which conflicts with the general thrust of the teaching on the basis of which Plato was capable of founding a millennial tradition, led him "to muse on Plato's secrecy and sphinx-like nature," he might be imagining a reader gaining similar experiences in reading his own work (Sect. 28). It is indeed remarkable how often Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil* reflects on the art of writing and the corresponding art of reading, therewith intimating how he desires to be read if his true intention is to be understood.

In keeping with the preliminary character of these considerations, I will limit myself to the most obvious: Nietzsche's explicit reminder of the art of exoteric-esoteric writing and its tradition.<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche starts from the observation that the same insights take on a different meaning or flavor according to the nature of those who come across them (Sect. 30). While they appear as what they might be, namely, very deep insights, to him who discovers them on his own, they take on the character of "follies" or "crimes" to those who simply come across them without any effort of their own or who are, by their particular nature, not predisposed to such insights. Neither the way that leads to a thought nor the particularly molded nature of the person who comes to think this thought is extraneous to an insight. Similarly, a text is not something simply "given." It depends on the "art of nuance" of the interpreter, whether he understands the text as its author intended it, or whether he remodels or disfigures it to agree with his own preconceptions (cf. Sect. 38, 22). With this observation, Nietzsche merely summarizes a line of thought he had been developing throughout the first part of the second chapter. It induces him to recall the exoteric-esoteric tradition as it existed

<sup>13</sup> This is the only time in his published works that Nietzsche mentions the exoteric-esoteric distinction. The problem is generally treated under other headings, for example under the heading of the "mask." While taking into account the exoteric-esoteric distinction, Maudemarie Clark and David Dudrick, *The Soul of Nietzsche's "Beyond Good and Evil"* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012) fail to see its connection with the distinction of different types of addressees and the different teachings intended for them. They thus arrive at the curious result that, whereas Nietzsche's exoteric teaching in a shocking way calls into question the conventional belief in free will, persons, and morality, his esoteric teaching is in perfect agreement with such conventional views.

“among the Indians, as among the Greeks, the Persians, and Mussulmans.” While proceeding to an elucidation of the distinction, Nietzsche shifts from the exoterical and the esoterical as two modes of speech to the distinction between the exoteric type and the esoteric type as two classes of people.<sup>14</sup> The shift suggests a strict correspondence between modes of speech and classes of people. The exoteric type is characterized as one who “sees things from below,” whereas the esoteric type “sees them *from above*.” Correspondingly, the exoteric speech presents things as they appear from below, the esoteric speech as they appear from above. The exoteric and the esoteric type might very well refer to two different classes of people, if we take them to refer to the addressees of a speech. If we take them to refer to the author of a speech, we must assume that he delivers two different speeches, adapted to the two different classes of addressees. A writer, however, cannot avoid being read by anyone who is capable of reading. He is thus obliged to address both types of addressees with one and the same speech. While the exoteric and the esoteric types, as the addressees of a speech, are each associated with one sole perspective, the author who addresses them distinguishes himself from both in that he must be capable of adopting both perspectives simultaneously or alternately. He must be able to address two different kinds of addressees at the same time, while saying different things to each of them. The distinction between those who simply look at things from above and those who look at things from below must thus be supplemented by someone who is capable of looking at things both from above and from below and who in this respect is superior even to those who look at them from above (cf. Sect. 211).

Some sections earlier Nietzsche had, indeed, introduced a most important distinction concerning “excellent men” (Sect. 26). He had distinguished those excellent men who prefer to look at things only from above, who are repelled by the mere thought of having to look at them from the common perspective, and who thus prefer to talk only to their equals, from the excellent man who, by his desire for knowledge, is moved also to take the perspective from below. The most excellent man, who is guided primarily by a desire for knowledge, will therefore speak at the same time to those excellent men who simply prefer to look at things from above and to those who are not at all excellent and who look at things only from below, that is, to the common people. For him *both* kinds of speech would be exoteric. While both types of excellent men seem to share a common belief in an order of rank or

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<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche first distinguishes between “das Exoterische” and “das Esoterische,” then shifts to “der Exoteriker” and “der Esoteriker.” I will translate this as “the exoterical and the esoterical” and “the exoteric type and the esoteric type,” respectively.

in a fundamental inequality between men, they differ as to how this order, or inequality, is to be understood. In the later section (Sect. 30), Nietzsche constantly blurs the distinction between the “excellent men” and “the philosopher,” as if he had forgotten the distinction he had made earlier.<sup>15</sup> He thereby suggests that the excellent men will take “our deepest insights” for what they really are, namely, very deep insights. To illustrate this, one could think of people who would consider it criminal to propagate a teaching that claims everything to be will to power or even to present this teaching as the principle of all morality. They might even consider it “folly,” in that it appears to be too much in conflict with the phenomena to be taken seriously. One could, however, also think of a certain breed of man, for whom a doctrine of will to power, as the essence of the world, would constitute neither folly nor crime, without it having to be considered by them for this reason to be a very deep insight. They might rather consider it to be the greatest of trivialities, since they of themselves interpret their own actions as guided solely by some “will to power.” They might, however, consider it “folly” to divulge such an “insight,” insofar as the effectiveness of their will to power requires it not to be recognized as such. In conclusion, Nietzsche turns to the effect a certain type of speech might exert on the different type of addressees and which should be taken into account by any wise speaker. While a certain type of speech might act as “nourishment and refreshment” on the excellent men, it might act as “poison” on the people, supposedly because it is apt to undermine their most precious convictions. The same doctrine, which would stimulate the former to courage and bravery, would for the latter be a reason for desperation. Given the fact that one wants to speak to both types of addressees one is obliged to present the doctrine in such a way as not to lead the latter into despair, while nevertheless being apt to stimulate the courage of the former.

If, therefore, the exoteric-esoteric distinction is to be successfully applied, it must be veiled. The different types of addressees should not be led to suspect that the author is addressing several types of addressees simultaneously or alternately, but should instead be convinced that he is speaking to them directly and exclusively. They must be tempted to overlook those statements of the author which, on closer inspection, might reveal themselves to be hardly reconcilable with their own point of view (cf. Sect. 230). While the author thus puts on different masks while speaking to different addressees, the mask itself and the plurality of masks must be masked (cf. Sect. 278). The

<sup>15</sup> Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task*, does not seem to take into account this distinction. He rather seems to equate the philosopher and the noble man. Accordingly, to him Nietzsche's use of the exoteric-esoteric distinction appears to be exclusively motivated by political reasons or by the actual historical situation.

mask can take effect only as long as it is not perceived to be a mask, just as the will to power itself can best achieve its aims when it is disguised under more respectable claims. The reader must thus be brought to believe that the writer is speaking frankly and sincerely, led by no other motive than the mere will to truth, or mere truthfulness. It deserves notice that even those who strongly disagree with what they take to be Nietzsche's position can hardly refrain from admiring, or at least respecting, the perfect frankness with which he professed what he considered to be the truth. Nietzsche achieves this aim by making use of an indefinite "we." More often than not, he speaks not in his own name but as a member or a representative of a collective. The use of "we" invites the reader to include himself into this collective and to identify with its aims. *Beyond Good and Evil* thus seems to take on the appearance of a "book for the general reader," that is, a book that does not differentiate between its addressees (Sect. 30).

We can conclude that the philosopher distinguishes himself from the excellent men by his ability to look at things from *both* perspectives and to address different people differently. On the basis of our earlier considerations, we can thus already discern two types of addressees of Nietzsche's teaching: the masters and the slaves or, in a more subdued language, the noble or the excellent men and the people. Nietzsche's statements on the two kinds of morality intend to contribute to a better self-understanding of both types of men. They seem to confirm both types in their prejudices. This seems at least to be the case for the excellent men, as they are confirmed in their vanity and in their contempt for the people. Though the designation of the people as "slaves" might perhaps for some prove not to be altogether profitless as regards a more adequate self-understanding, it yet seems to be more fit to arouse indignation. Supposing the will to power to be, in truth, the essence of the world, at least of the "civil world" or the "world which we believe we live in" (Sect. 34), the will to truth in the sense of truthfulness would show itself to be indeed dangerous already in that, by shattering the illusions on which society rests, it tends to destabilize it.<sup>16</sup> The distinction between masters and slaves thus not merely pertains to the subject matter of the book, but is simultaneously constitutive for its rhetoric. In permitting that distinction to determine the rhetoric of the book itself, Nietzsche demonstrates the political problem *ad oculos*, so that the reader, if he is square with himself, can gain an insight into it by his own experience. This is not to say that those two

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<sup>16</sup> Consider, for example, Sect. 46, where Nietzsche points out that the indignation of the "slaves" poses a threat to the stability of society.

types of addressees are the main addressees of the book, nor that the teaching Nietzsche reserved for them is its principal teaching. It is not to be excluded that some readers will notice Nietzsche's use of the exoteric-esoteric distinction and turn this observation to their profit. Such a reader would gradually learn to see things from both perspectives, to perceive the changes in tempo, in tune, and in key and to think together for himself Nietzsche's intentions with his book (cf. Sect. 246). We are thus led to wonder if such a reader, who thereby would display a kindred nature, is to be identified with the free spirit who seems to be the privileged addressee of the book.

We cannot hope to find an answer to this decisive question without taking into account what is generally considered to be Nietzsche's central teaching: the doctrine of the will to power.<sup>17</sup> We already hinted in passing at the understanding of this doctrine that Nietzsche intended for the first two types of addressees, and can henceforth rightly abstract from this side of the question. It should be remarked that in *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche does not once seem to offer a straightforward definition of his central concept. He rather operates with it without stating in all clarity what he wants to have understood by it. He thus seems to expect that his readers will have no difficulty knowing what is meant by "will to power" and will consider it to be something which is immediately evident (cf. Sect. 16, 19). He thereby takes the risk that they will read into this concept whatever comes to their mind or whatever they might want to read into it. There thus seem to be only interpretations of what "will to power" is, but no text. Before we subscribe too hastily to this conclusion, let us first take a closer look at the text.

"Will to power" is introduced in Sect. 9, which constitutes the culmination of a first subsection of the first chapter. In the same section "nature" is discussed. "Nature" was introduced in Sect. 6. In this section Nietzsche had sharply distinguished a "drive to knowledge" from the "will to truth," with which he had opened the book. Whereas the latter, in embracing the whole person and thus constituting the core of his existence, is characteristic and revelatory of his "nature" or, more precisely, of the "order of rank in which the innermost drives of his nature stand relative to one another," the "drive to knowledge" is merely an aspect of a person. Insofar as it can be instrumentalized by other drives and thus does not need to be the governing principle

<sup>17</sup> The superman (*Übermensch*), the will to power, and the eternal recurrence, which were first introduced in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, are generally considered to constitute Nietzsche's central doctrines. Of these three, only the will to power is taken up in *Beyond Good and Evil*. The eternal recurrence is only alluded to (Sect. 56), without the name of the concept appearing in the text.

of his personality, it does not typify him. Section 9 takes up the concept of “nature” by quoting the central maxim of the Stoics: to live “according to nature.” Nietzsche seems to treat this maxim as a riddle as he proposes several possible readings in order to make sense of it. At first Nietzsche takes the Stoic maxim literally, then rejects this reading, since if we take the central features of “nature” to be a lack of moderation, justice, and intention, as Nietzsche thinks we must, the maxim proves to be unsuitable to offer guidance to life and thus falls short of the Stoics’ assumed intention. To arrive at a more sensible interpretation Nietzsche substitutes “life” for “nature.” This substitution suggests that the identification or confusion of “nature” with “life” is normally considered to be a matter of course. Nietzsche, however, takes the opportunity to draw a sharp distinction between “nature” and “life.” The immoderate wastefulness of nature is opposed to the necessity pertaining to life to calculate and to manage its limited resources economically.<sup>18</sup> Whereas nature was defined as immoderately indifferent and disinterested, life is defined as compelled to establish priorities and an order of rank between its different means and aims. The only feature nature and life seem to have in common is their lack of justice: nature’s injustice shows especially in its treatment of the higher or more exceptional natures, which is a simple consequence of its indifference towards any orders of rank (cf. Sect. 268, 269), whereas life is constrained to be unjust insofar as the concern with one’s own good ultimately overrules other considerations. The concern with one’s own good seems to be so intrinsically linked up with life that it utterly excludes the possibility of an undetached view. Both readings thus issue in the same question, namely, how a life according to the standard of “nature” would be possible at all. A life in accordance with “nature” seems impossible precisely because “nature” is beyond good and evil or even good and bad, whereas “life” seems necessarily to have to rely on such normative differences and cannot be “value free.”<sup>19</sup> The question, which seemed merely rhetorical at first and seemed to be raised only with the intention of rejecting the maxim, on closer inspection turns out to be the leading question of *Beyond Good and Evil* itself: How might a life in accordance with “nature” or beyond good and evil prove to be possible?<sup>20</sup> From this it follows that establishing “life” as the

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<sup>18</sup> “Here as everywhere ‘nature’ shows itself *as it is*, in all its prodigal and *indifferent* magnificence, which fills with indignation, though it is noble” (Sect. 188; emphasis added). It is especially nature’s indifference and lack of concern towards the higher natures that fills one with indignation as it seems to leave success or failure of the higher men in developing their natures to chance (cf. Sect. 203, 274).

<sup>19</sup> Thus already the title of the book points to the concept of “nature.”

<sup>20</sup> One could reformulate the question as: How is it possible for a human being to live as an Epicurean god? (Cf. Sect. 62).

fundamental perspective or standard, as Nietzsche seemed to have done in the preceding sections, by itself implies the impossibility of transcending this perspective towards a standpoint beyond morality or beyond good and evil. While the perspective of life might eventually allow for a transcending of a certain type of morality towards another type, it seems to exclude in principle the possibility of taking a standpoint beyond morality as such. The predicate “immoral” could thus be attributed only from the standpoint of a specific type of morality; it could not mean the freedom of moral considerations as such. In the preceding sections, Nietzsche had indeed suggested that the teachings of the philosophers always ensued from their “moral (or immoral) intentions” (Sect. 6; cf. Sect. 2, 5). The disclosure of the moral basis of philosophy was intended to arouse suspicion about the philosopher’s claim to be led exclusively by a will to truth.

Neither of the two interpretations succeeded in making sense of the Stoic maxim. Instead of an interpretation Nietzsche therefore now offers an *explanation* of the fact that the Stoics propounded a maxim that on closer inspection does not prove to make sense, or of the fact that they might even sincerely have believed it to be the guiding principle of their life. It is only in this context that the will to power is introduced. It is thus in the context of an interpretation of the *doings* of the philosophers that Nietzsche introduces the concept of will to power. Their doings consist essentially in an interpretation of “nature.” In purporting to base their moral teaching on nature, the Stoics, according to Nietzsche, fell victim to a delusion: while pretending, or maybe even sincerely believing, to base their moral teaching on nature, they in fact developed their concept of nature in such a way that it would be in agreement with their concept of morality. One can thus say that they confused “nature” and “life” (in its highest manifestation). Their doings thus seem guided not so much by a will to truth as by an attempt to justify their own way of life as being in accordance with “nature.” Now this seems to be exactly what Nietzsche himself is proposing in the next sections which mention will to power. He seems to argue for an interpretation of nature as a whole, including all organic and inorganic phenomena, as manifestations of will to power (Sect. 13, 22, 36). This seems to expose the doctrine of the will to power to the same objection that Nietzsche had directed against the Stoics. The doctrine of will to power would be the product of self-delusion, of a refusal to take into consideration phenomena which cannot be justly—that is, without distorting their proper meaning—interpreted in this sense. As philosophers develop a concept of nature in accordance with their moral teaching, their doing thus can be interpreted as a manifestation of their will to power. This

interpretation of the doings of the philosophers is taken in a second step as the basis for a new theory of nature. It should be noted that Nietzsche suggests that the Stoic philosophers fell victim to self-delusion only as they were unconscious of what they were doing. Nietzsche himself, in any case, seems very well to be conscious of what he is doing, as he first points out a procedure that he afterwards applies himself.

This observation could lead us to suspect that with the doctrine of the will to power Nietzsche might be intending to launch an “error,” which could prove to be as tiresome and dangerous as Plato’s error, though it might, in the long run, turn out to be only a “promise across millennia” (Preface). But, in addition, he also points to some insoluble difficulties with which the doctrine is invested. We limit ourselves to the following: Throughout the first chapter Nietzsche had made every possible effort to convince the free spirits of the fact that there is no truth, that the attainment of truth is impossible, that truth itself is only a fiction and that every claim to truth should be approached with the utmost distrust. Instead, he invites his readers to search for a hidden will to power underneath every claim to truth. With this, the distinction between truth and fiction, between the real and the apparent world, seems to be abolished. Every alleged truth would be a mere fiction in the service of some will to power. This seems to be the logical consequence of the doctrine of will to power. At the same time, the doctrine cannot be upheld without making use of the distinction between truth and appearance: if all reality is “in truth” will to power, then anything which fails to show manifestly *as* will to power must be considered fictitious or deceitful. First, the will to power *itself* would be unable to operate successfully if it were forbidden to have recourse to this distinction. It can be effective only if it disguises itself as something else. In this case, the distinction itself would be a fiction which the will to power makes use of. A theory that advocates the abolition of that distinction would therefore seem to thwart the effectiveness of the will to power. Second, the *doctrine* of will to power itself has to operate with the distinction, without which it would collapse: it has to consider all phenomena, at least all phenomena pertaining to the human world, as mere appearances, as deceiving, if it is to be able to detect underneath these fictions a genuine will to power. All interpretations and fictions suppose as their genuine text the will to power: it should prove to be the only text that can be read out of all phenomena. The doctrine therefore seems to be inconsistent. It cannot do without the supplement of the distinction between truth and appearance, for which it does not, however, allow. Without this distinction, it cannot operate; with it,

it becomes inconsistent. Is the doctrine, then, simply false? Do these difficulties constitute a refutation of Nietzsche's central doctrine?

Nietzsche assures us, however that the falsity of a judgment (as, for example: "the world seen from within is 'will to power' and nothing else"; cf. Sect. 36) is not sufficient as an objection to this judgment (Sect. 4). So the falsity of the theory might be insufficient for rejecting it altogether. There might be reasons for upholding a doctrine which one considers false or at least inconsistent. These reasons seem to pertain to morality or to "life": when the belief in the truth of a judgment or a doctrine seems indispensable for the conservation of life, it seems justified to believe in it, even if one considers it to be false. At first glance, this seems to be an inconsistent contention. How can one and the same person believe in the truth of a doctrine that he considers to be false? The inconsistency disappears as soon as one takes the person who considers the doctrine to be false, and the person who ought to believe in it, as two different people. If one has solid grounds for assuming that it might be salutary for someone to take something as true, then one is entitled to teach it as being true. One then has the right, and maybe even the duty, to conceal whatever speaks against the truth of that doctrine. This seems to be a consistent and maybe even a moral position: one prefers not to disturb someone else's delusion, because one thinks one has valid grounds for assuming that it would be better for him not to believe in this truth than it would be if his belief were destroyed. Nietzsche not only mentions such truths as are "species-conserving," but also such truths as are "species-breeding." The belief in certain truths can breed a certain type of human being. For a certain type of people it can be salutary to believe in certain truths for a certain period of time. Considering the fact that the doctrine of will to power is inconsistent, that the falsity of this doctrine is not yet a decisive argument against it, one might wonder what kind of disciplinary or educational effect it might have.<sup>21</sup>

The rather perplexing observation that Nietzsche has deposited some arguments which might be directed against the very doctrine which, by the average reader, must be considered to be his central teaching, forces us to ask

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<sup>21</sup> Consider Nietzsche's remark that Copernicus "has *persuaded us to believe*, contrary to all senses, that the earth does *not* stand fast," whereas Boscovich "has taught us to *abjure the belief* in the last thing that 'stood fast' of the earth" (Sect. 12; emphasis added). Neither substituted the truth for an error, but one opinion or one belief for another opinion or belief. Similarly the belief in a fundamental convergence of nature and human ends should be replaced by a belief in the tyrannical nature of nature. Nietzsche hints at the fact that such scientific hypotheses tend to undermine such beliefs as are (considered to be) of vital importance for the stability of society.

what his intentions are in deploying this double strategy.<sup>22</sup> To answer this question, we will have to consider the fact that the will to power receives its fullest exposition in Sect. 36, which occupies a slightly eccentric position in the chapter that bears the title “The Free Spirit” and which unites those elements of the doctrine that were hinted at in the second, third, and fourth mentions of will to power in the first chapter, while omitting the context of its first introduction.<sup>23</sup> The second and the third time Nietzsche mentions the will to power, he presents it as a means of interpretation. In the second mention the physiologists are bidden to consider whether natural, physiological, or organic phenomena should not be more adequately interpreted as resulting from a will to power rather than from a will to self-preservation (Sect. 13). It is offered as an alternative means of interpretation, one truer to the facts. The same holds for the third mention (Sect. 22): this time it is the physicists who are bidden to consider interpreting natural, nonorganic phenomena as issuing from a “will to power” rather than as being governed by natural laws. While the first proposition seems to make some difference with regard to phenomena, insofar as Nietzsche suggests that the hypothesis of self-preservation might not be able to account for all phenomena of organic life, the second proposition makes no difference with regard to the phenomena: the same phenomena seem to allow for two opposed interpretations. This implies that, at least as regards nonorganic phenomena, neither of the two hypotheses can be falsified, let alone verified. The “text” thus seems to allow for both interpretations. The “will to power” is presented here as a hypothesis which is thought not so much to explain, but merely to interpret, some given phenomena.

This seems to be confirmed by the famous Sect. 36, which offers the most extensive treatment of will to power.<sup>24</sup> Linking up with the suggestion to conceive of psychology as a “morphology and development-theory of will to power,” which will lead us back to the “fundamental problems” (Sect. 23), Nietzsche now proposes to interpret all organic and inorganic phenomena

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<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche draws the attention of the reader once more to this concept by announcing, on the back cover, that he is preparing a four-part work on *The Will to Power: Attempt at a Transvaluation of All Values; In Four Books* (Der Wille zur Macht. Versuch einer Umwerthung aller Werthe. In vier Büchern). He repeats this announcement one year later in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (III 27; KSA 5: 409).

<sup>23</sup> The connection between will to power and eternal recurrence is indicated by the fact that the only section which hints at the eternal recurrence is equally slightly eccentric: Sect. 36 is the thirteenth section of 21 sections, whereas Sect. 56 is the twelfth section of 18 sections.

<sup>24</sup> This is the only section in the second chapter which mentions the will to power. It is mentioned four times. All four mentions, however, appear in the last of the three subsections.

according to the model of “our world of desires and passions.” All of nature should thus be interpreted as (rudimentary) forms of life. Thereby the fundamental distinction between “life” and “nature” is once again obliterated. Even more emphatically than in the earlier mentions Nietzsche presents the doctrine of will to power as a hypothesis. Moreover, he expressly summons his readers to prove it; he even declares it to be a moral duty to make every possible effort to prove this hypothesis to be true. It is left to the reader to decide whether Nietzsche thought it likely that such efforts might, in fact, succeed or if he rather reckoned that they would fail. He warns him, in any event, that the endeavor to take this theoretical experiment “to its ultimate limits” might lead it “to the point of nonsense.” However this may be, precisely in trying to do one’s utmost to prove it, one might encounter such phenomena as would in no way allow for an interpretation in agreement with that hypothesis. While it might still prove to be true or at least helpful for interpreting a limited realm of phenomena, it would have proved not to be suitable as a metaphysical or ontological principle underlying the whole of things. Even if the effort to prove the hypothesis were to fail, it would at least have had the advantage of making one aware of its limits and thus pointing to phenomena that one might otherwise have overlooked. Nietzsche’s intention in presenting his central teaching as a hypothesis is, however, not limited to the hint that he might not be endorsing this view. The question to what extent he considered it to be a solid metaphysical doctrine seems to allow for a fairly unambiguous answer, if we take into account the theoretical difficulties with which it is invested and at which he himself hints. Through the hypothetical formulation instead of a dogmatic one, Nietzsche rather seeks to persuade some of his readers to engage in a theoretical enterprise. They are expected to enlist in a team of intellectual laborers who place themselves entirely in the service of proving this doctrine to be true. Nietzsche does not want them to accept the doctrine as a dogmatic truth on the sole basis of his own authority, but wants to encourage them to make an intellectual effort. In this respect, the doctrine might have at least a disciplinary effect, comparable to the will to think “under Aristotelian presuppositions” or “to interpret all events according to a Christian scheme and to rediscover and justify the Christian God in every chance occurrence” (Sect. 188). Nietzsche himself values the doctrine not so much according to the criteria of truth or falsity, but mainly to the extent to which it is “life-advancing, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-breeding” (Sect. 4). The “life” which should be advanced and preserved, the “species” which is to be preserved and

perhaps even bred, might be more specific than humanity as such.<sup>25</sup> Whereas the hypothetical formulation of the doctrine of will to power might tempt the reader to engage in an intellectual enterprise to develop and prove the theory, the insoluble difficulties with the doctrine, which are only hinted at between the lines, might cast some doubt on the well-foundedness of the doctrine and may thus engage the reader in the endeavor of finding counterarguments against the doctrine. After the reader has passed through the disciplinary phase of learning to interpret all events according to the scheme of will to power, he might have become strong enough to try to refute the doctrine by looking for counterarguments (cf. Sect. 18). But, as Nietzsche remarks, even this second stage still belongs to “youth” or is intended as merely a stage in the development of the reader (Sect. 31).

In this context it proves to be significant that the doctrine of will to power is presented primarily as an instrument for a critique of the doctrine of equal rights, which claims to be founded on “nature.”<sup>26</sup> It allows us also to see why Nietzsche designates as “free spirits” those intellectual laborers to whom he addresses the doctrine, while at the same time distinguishing them from the adherents of the theory of equal rights, who are usually called free spirits. The

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<sup>25</sup> The interpretation of the doctrine of will to power by Wolfgang Müller-Lauter relies mainly on the posthumous fragments, especially on an early version of Sect. 36, which lacks the hypothetical presentation (“Nietzsches Lehre vom Willen zur Macht,” in *Über Werden und Wille zur Macht: Nietzsche-Interpretationen I* [Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999], 25–95, esp. 33–36). This argument is unconvincing if only because Nietzsche chose to publish the hypothetical formulation; we can safely assume that Nietzsche considered the published version to be superior. The more decisive argument against Müller-Lauter’s line of interpretation, however, is to be found in the fact that Nietzsche indicates on which theoretical grounds the theory is at least to be considered problematical. Müller-Lauter, moreover, does not take into account the primary addressees of the doctrine and the reasons Nietzsche considered it to be useful and helpful in the present historic situation to promulgate such a doctrine. The concept of will to power is the central concept of a theory centering on *life*, whereas Nietzsche aims at a philosophy that centers on the concept of *nature*. A theory of life cannot take a stand beyond good and evil. The task of the free spirits should thus not be confused with the task assigned to the philosopher, which consists in a translation of man back into nature with the view of self-knowledge (Sect. 230, 231). The philosopher uses the concept of will to power as a tool to critically investigate to what extent his drive for knowledge is indeed determined by a will to truth or instead instrumentalized by a will to power. This critical intention of the concept becomes clear from the central passage in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* where will to power is discussed: Zarathustra summons the “most wise men” to consider to what degree their alleged will to truth is in fact a will to power. This is not to say that *all* will to truth is merely and necessarily a will to power; the concept of will to power should serve as a critical means to be directed against the most spontaneous and precious belief of the philosopher (cf. Sect. 2). Moreover, the teaching of will to power is here presented as characteristic of all things living. Will to power thus is characteristic of life, as distinguished from nature (KSA 4: 132ff.). The last mention of will to power in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* points to an insoluble difficulty with which the concept is invested (KSA 4: 179–80).

<sup>26</sup> The alleged free spirits are proponents of the “modern ideas.” The fundamental modern idea is the idea of equal rights (cf. Sect. 10, 20, 30, 44, 58, 201–3, 212, 219, 222, 239, 242, 251, 253, 260, 263).

free spirit is the primary addressee of the doctrine of will to power. The concept of will to power is intended as a tool, by which the spirit is enabled to free himself from moral prejudices. In this sense one can say that the free spirit is the *product* of this doctrine: the freedom of spirit is brought forth by the application of the concept to all phenomena. At the same time the free spirits are also to be thought of as the main agents or *representatives* of this doctrine. In taking up this teaching, they are led to political action. Through this doctrine they become aware of a radical alternative to the predominant political theories of the age. They therefore distinguish themselves most sharply from the class of alleged "free spirits" (Sect. 44). The criticism of the alleged free spirits focuses on the doctrine they advocate as well as on the goal they set themselves, namely, to bring about a certain state of society which would be in complete agreement with the principle of equality of rights. The genuine and the alleged free spirits are distinguished by the belief or disbelief in the self-evidence of this principle. The genuine free spirits are free or freer exactly because they do not consider the equality of rights a self-evident principle. Both types are therefore mainly distinguished by a *doctrinal* belief.

Even the genuine free spirits, however, appear to be a kind of hybrid. In proposing the proof of the hypothesis of the will to power as their characteristic task, Nietzsche addresses them as men who are specifically interested in knowledge, especially when the quest for knowledge is presented as being risky, even dangerous, deviating from common opinions, and promising the discovery of some wholly new ideas. At the same time they draw some immediate practical conclusions from their theoretical insights. They distinguish themselves from the alleged free spirits not only by their theoretical stance, but likewise by the practical and political aims that follow from them. While the alleged free spirits aim at a reform of society to make it agree with their theoretical assumption of a natural equality of all men, the self-appointed genuine free spirits conversely question precisely the naturalness of this equality, and from the assumption of a fundamental inequality between men infer the necessity of the establishment of a regime which does justice to the natural order of rank of men. Notwithstanding their diverging assumptions and corresponding political aims, both types of free spirits seem to show some common traits. This indeed justifies them being designated by the same term. The political action of both types of free spirits, for example, is inspired by their sense of justice: while the alleged free spirits consider the hierarchical organization of any society to be in contradiction with natural equality, the genuine free spirits regard the conception of a society in which all would be treated equally as an injustice done to the more excellent men.

We should note a last, most important difference between both types of free spirits. The genuine as well as the alleged free spirits define themselves as precursors: they are preparing for a future state of society. The alleged free spirits understand themselves as preparing for a state of society in which the equality of rights will be fully realized, in which the doctrine of natural right will no longer be an ideal, but will have become reality. To this extent they might, with a certain right, be labeled philosophers of the future. In this capacity they are working at their own abolition: with the advent of that future state of society, philosophy would become altogether superfluous. In a sense, for them philosophy is already superfluous: they regard the question concerning the good life as fundamentally settled; what remains to be done is the implementation of this insight (cf. Sect. 202). This goes together with positivism, with an absorption of philosophy into science: now that practical inquiry is closed, one can devote oneself entirely and solely to the pursuit of pure, value-free knowledge or to investigations of the foundations of knowledge (cf. Sect. 10, 204, 210).

The situation is somewhat different in the case of the genuine free spirits. Though the theoretical enterprise of developing a full-fledged doctrine of will to power constitutes an important phase of the education of the free spirits, one that might even give rise to the opposite theoretical effort to try to refute the doctrine, the crucial problem with the doctrine seems to be the following: The free spirit is trained to interpret everything as an expression of will to power. This doctrine is directed against the teaching of equal rights as founded in nature. If properly carried through, the doctrine will lead to the result that no rights can be founded on nature. All rights thus seem to be entirely conventional. As the free spirit understands his theoretical endeavor primarily in view of a change in society that should be founded on the proper or true theory of nature, he is thus faced with the problem that no society can be founded on nature. The foundation of society thus seems to ask for a substitute for nature. This substitute is the philosopher as legislator (Sect. 211). The inequality between men can legitimately be upheld only if in the political hierarchy a place is provided for such men who distinguish themselves by their exceptional insight and wisdom. In this way, the tension between philosophy and politics might be resolved. The philosophers can thus be integrated into the political order by assigning to them the role of legislators. The task of the free spirits, which consists in the carrying through of the doctrine of will to power with a view to a critique of existing values, thus calls of itself for the supplementary task of creating and introducing new values. This task is assigned to a new type of philosophers. With respect to the free spirits this

implies that they can understand themselves only as precursors or heralds of future philosophers (Sect. 44). The understanding and dissemination of the doctrine of will to power as the task proper to the free spirits thus proves to be only a “prelude to a philosophy of the future.” Conversely, the philosophers of the future must understand themselves as only succeeding to the free spirits; their own proper task can be carried through only on the basis prepared by the free spirits. The free spirit and the philosopher as legislator thus are complementary concepts: each implies the other. Only taken together do they constitute a whole. Both are defined by their respective tasks. Both tasks are complementary without coinciding. Whereas the task of the free spirit consists in the elaboration of a theory of will to power and of a spiritual warfare to spread this doctrine, the task of the philosophers of the future consists in the introduction of the noble morality. The task of the free spirits consists in a search for knowledge for the benefit of action; the task of the future philosophers consists in action based on knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

Insofar as the political action of the free spirits is motivated by a sense of justice, however, they are not absolutely beyond good and evil as such. At least their political action stems from a moral motive. Morality, however, constitutes the core of their being in a still more fundamental way. Nietzsche exhorted the free spirits to question all alleged “truths” and all metaphysical contentions in regard to the moral intentions that supposedly dictated them. They all are under the suspicion of being fictions, devised to make life more bearable, more enjoyable, more cheerful (Sect. 24). The fact that they seem particularly apt to make people happy or virtuous seemed reason enough to approach them with due distrust (Sect. 39). The doctrine of will to power recommended itself precisely because it is suitable for shattering such comforting illusions. While previously the gratifying character of an opinion was taken as an argument in favor of its truth, it seems as if Nietzsche now argues that the saddening or depressing character of an opinion is an indication or even a criterion for its truth. The free spirits deny themselves any comforting thought. They are brave enough to endure even the most distressful thought (Sect. 1, 23, 55, 229, 257). Their will to truth is essentially intellectual probity, the will to renounce every thought that inspires happiness or contentment.

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<sup>27</sup> Lomax is thus right in repudiating the identification of Nietzsche and the philosophers of the future; this does not, however, imply that the identification of Nietzsche with the free spirits is justified (*Paradox of Philosophical Education*, 80; cf. 95ff.). Maybe our interpretation can also help to substantiate Lomax's claim that “Nietzsche's teaching on nobility does not follow with logical necessity from the doctrine of the will to power” (ibid., 14; cf. 99). The two doctrines do, however, have in common that they are both motivated by a specific historical situation (Sect. 202, 203, 212).

The free spirits, namely, brand their “subtlest, most disguised, most spiritualized will to power” a “vice” which is justified just as long as it operates in the service of probity (Sect. 227).<sup>28</sup> The hypothesis of the will to power thus seems to reach its limit exactly in the figure of the free spirit. Probity, as the distinctive virtue of the free spirit, cannot, it seems, be understood as an expression of will to power. It seems to rest instead on an unconditional moral command. He who answers its call is willing to sacrifice everything to it (cf. Sect. 55). For this reason, Nietzsche, by a subtle hint, reminds his readers of the enigmatic comment he had appended to the fullest exposition of the will to power. From this doctrine his “friends” deduced that it implied the refutation of God, but not of the devil. Nietzsche retorted: “On the contrary! On the contrary, my friends!” (Sect. 37). Intellectual probity preserves the core of morality and of sanctity. While on a first reading “the free spirit” (second chapter) and “the religious being” (third chapter) appeared to constitute mutually exclusive alternatives, Nietzsche now points to their common root. The genuine free spirit is just as little in a position to meet the challenge of religion as the alleged free spirits: his self-understanding is, consciously or unconsciously, determined by the ideal of the saint (cf. Sect. 229 and 47, 51), his understanding of politics, which is directed towards a new type of philosopher as legislator, cannot do without religion as a supplement to new laws, if these are to be effectively introduced (Sect. 61). But, however radical, however cruel, however unrelenting, intellectual probity cannot preserve itself from the threat of vanity, of self-love and self-admiration, notwithstanding the most pitiless cruelty directed against oneself (cf. Sect. 227 and 229). It does not succeed in becoming a disinterested, selfless action: one sacrifices something (one’s illusions) to have something else (a feeling of power, of self-admiration) (Sect. 220). The ideal of probity is thus not self-consistent. By focusing on the glorifying, idealizing, comforting aspect of religion, it overlooks the cruel aspect of religion and thereby its fundamental similarity with religion.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> In Sect. 227, the central section of the central chapter of the second part of the book (chaps. 5–9), Nietzsche joins together arguments that he had developed in the first part (chaps. 1–3) at remote places. Compare Sect. 9, where the practice of the Stoics is said to be an expression of “a most spiritualized will to power”; Sect. 36 and Sect. 37; Sect. 44, where the concept of the “free spirit” is developed; Sect. 45, which mentions curiosity as a most pleasant vice; Sect. 47 and Sect. 51, which treat the relation of the philosophers and the powerful to the saint; while the former are bound to consider the saint to be an anomaly, as long as they do not question the opposition of values, the latter see in him nothing more than a manifestation of the will to power. The function of the analyses in the third chapter remains enigmatic as long as it is not read in conjunction with the seventh chapter in particular. The third chapter, namely, offers almost nothing substantially new, if compared to the elaborated analyses of religion in *Human, All Too Human* and *Daybreak*. Even less does it offer an even tentatively comprehensive account of the phenomenon or the “essence” of religion.

<sup>29</sup> It should be noted that the whole critique of philosophy in the first chapter, at least in its

Whereas probity thus seems to point to an unconditional moral command, Nietzsche offers an alternative natural explanation that seems more in accord with will to power. Cruelty itself might also be understood as issuing from a will to power turned against itself. He begins by pointing out that a drive to knowledge is inherent in the “fundamental will of the spirit” (Sect. 230).<sup>30</sup> This drive to knowledge is, however, instrumental to a will to appropriation and expansion and thus equals a will to simplification. The drive to knowledge is thus fundamentally restricted by the will to which it is subservient. Seen from another perspective it can therefore be designated as a will to ignorance. Nietzsche rightly designates the will to ignorance as an only “apparently opposed drive,” as both it and the drive to knowledge are fundamentally identical and only different aspects of one and the same will (cf. Sect. 24, 34). The third and the fourth constitutive elements of the “fundamental will of the spirit” follow analytically from the first two components: the “occasional will of the spirit to let itself be deceived” and the “willingness of the spirit to deceive other spirits.” All four elements of the “fundamental will of the spirit” turn out to be mere aspects of a fundamental will to appearance (*Schein*). Although will to power is not explicitly mentioned in this section, it is clearly intended, since Nietzsche here analyzes the will to knowledge insofar as it is only an expression of the will to power: the main aim of this will is “to be master” and “to feel itself master.”<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche seems to avoid mentioning the will to power precisely because he is here offering a critical analysis of the concept. The will to truth of the legislator, which Nietzsche earlier had declared to be essentially a will to power (Sect. 211), is now presented as being only a will to appearance and to that extent in accordance with life. With respect to the fundamental will of the spirit the will to truth must appear as cruelty or as a “spiritualization and intensification of cruelty” (Sect. 229). While it may have its *origin* in cruelty, probity can derive its real *worth* from the pleasure found in cruelty (cf. Sect. 1). The highest form of cruelty thus would at the same time be the highest form of pleasure. This might explain why Nietzsche prefers to substitute “curiosity” for “probity” (cf. Sect. 44, 45, 188, 214, 227, 270, 292). Carrying through the

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predominant polemical dimension, is already guided by the ideal of intellectual probity and is thus addressed to the free spirits.

<sup>30</sup> Section 230 constitutes a kind of counterpart to Sect. 19: while the latter section analyzes the will and discovers it to be essentially “something *complicated*,” the former section analyzes the “fundamental will of the spirit,” which proves to be equally complicated. Both analyses highlight four constitutive elements.

<sup>31</sup> This is confirmed by allusions to Sect. 13, Sect. 36, and Sect. 259, where will to power is explicitly mentioned.

two secondary tasks, which Nietzsche had assigned to the free spirits and the future philosophers, respectively, helps the philosopher to gain a proper insight into the origin or the causes of his will to truth, teaches him to examine the motives of his will to truth—in communicating and searching for the truth—and to evaluate properly the *value* of this will to truth. The concept of will to power thus proves to be a concept of distinction: First, it serves a critique and thereby a justification of the philosopher's claim to be led by a will to truth. Second, it serves to make a distinction between alleged and genuine philosophers (cf. Sect. 204): will to power is the characteristic trait of all nonphilosophers. Notwithstanding the fundamental differences between masters and slaves,<sup>32</sup> between free spirits and future philosophers, they all have in common that they are led by a will to power. When Nietzsche says that he found will to power everywhere, he conceals the sole exception: the philosophers, whose will to power is made subservient to their will to truth. Whereas the free spirit seems driven by cruelty to call into question his prejudices and to forbid himself the belief in any doctrine which might be just soothing, the philosopher discovers the value of the will to truth in *pleasure*.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, KSA 4: 147–48; *Genealogy of Morals*, III 14; KSA 5: 370.

<sup>33</sup> The substantiation of this claim requires and implies an interpretation of the fourth chapter as well as of the transition of Sect. 230 to Sect. 231–39. One can reasonably say that a proper understanding of these parts of the book constitutes the touchstone of any interpretation of the book as a whole. Our present considerations must therefore remain preliminary, if only because all interpretations of *Beyond Good and Evil* must remain so, as long as no consistent interpretation of the fourth chapter has been offered. While offering some valuable observations on this chapter, Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task*, 137–45, and Marcus Andreas Born, “‘Rath als Räthsel’: Das vierte Hauptstück: ‘Sprüche und Zwischenspiele,’” in *Friedrich Nietzsche: “Jenseits von Gut und Böse,”* ed. Marcus Andreas Born (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 91–109, cannot be considered to offer interpretations of this chapter in the full sense of the term. Consider the remarks by Leo Strauss, “Note on the Plan of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*,” in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 181ff.

## Machiavelli's Inflationary Economy of Violence: Notes on the Story of Agathocles

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### I

Half a millennium after its publication, *The Prince* continues to fascinate political scientists, not least because of the deep complexities and apparent double meanings woven throughout the work. One debate that has preoccupied students of Machiavelli's treatise is whether, ultimately, he means to limit or encourage the brutality that he sees as sometimes necessary for the prince to establish his power. Sheldon Wolin has famously ascribed to Machiavelli an "economy of violence, a science of the controlled application of force."<sup>1</sup> Wolin thus sees Machiavelli as attempting in the end to *limit* the use of violence. Similarly, Max Lerner understands Machiavelli to be a scientist who merely establishes a theory of the power politics that existed long before he took up his pen.<sup>2</sup> Redemptive readings of Machiavelli generally, especially those in the civic republican strain, have depended in part on the idea that Machiavelli means to channel rather than unleash violence. Leo Strauss, distinguishing himself from the civic republican reading, pronounces himself "inclined" at the outset of his analysis to the view that Machiavelli is a "teacher of evil" for whom violence is not limited by any principle of nature. But this inclination is also leavened by a close reading according to which Machiavelli carefully distinguishes between traditionally moral virtue and political virtue, with

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<sup>1</sup> Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 198.

<sup>2</sup> Max Lerner, ed., *The Prince and the Discourses* (New York: Random House, 1950), xliii.

the former indiscriminately condemning violence while the latter permits it under conditions of prudent use. Timothy J. Lukes ascribes to Machiavelli a “bestly humanism” that exhorts the prince to combine the cleverness of the fox with the “virility” of the lion.<sup>3</sup>

There is little question, to be sure, either that Machiavelli means at some level to defend the necessity of violence or that he places at least some limits on its acceptable use. Yet it makes a substantial difference in which direction we understand him to lean. That is, even if these alternatives do not exclude each other, which takes priority in the cases of ultimate conflict that must necessarily occur? Is Machiavelli ultimately exhorting a reluctant prince to utilize violence, or is he counseling an overly eager prince against excessive cruelty? The story of Agathocles has provided fodder for both answers and, consequently, for Machiavelli’s critics and apologists alike. Strauss, for example, cites Machiavelli’s willingness simultaneously to condone and condemn Agathocles as “perhaps the strongest proof of both the diabolical character and the sobriety of his thought.”<sup>4</sup> Robert Kocis points to Machiavelli’s observation that the tyrant cannot be celebrated “among the most famous men” as evidence of his misunderstood humanism: for Kocis, Machiavelli ultimately condemns Agathocles as lacking visions of glory because he was interested only in his personal political power (he acquires “power” but not “glory”).<sup>5</sup> David Wootton argues that *The Prince* condemns Agathocles for destroying the liberty of formerly democratic Syracuse.<sup>6</sup> Michael Palmer emphasizes Machiavelli’s recasting of Agathocles as a “king” rather than “tyrant,” suggesting that *The Prince* ultimately redeems him.<sup>7</sup>

Commentators have likewise diverged on whether Machiavelli uses the story to excuse the prudent use of violence or to discourage violence altogether. J. T. Scott and Vickie Sullivan argue that he does precisely what he says cannot be done in the case of Agathocles—“speak well of evil”—whereas

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<sup>3</sup> Timothy J. Lukes, “Lionizing Machiavelli,” *American Political Science Review* 95, no. 3 (2001): 561–75.

<sup>4</sup> Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 242.

<sup>5</sup> Robert A. Kocis, *Machiavelli Redeemed: Retrieving His Humanist Perspectives on Equality, Power, and Glory* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1998). Kocis uses the excerpt from *The Prince*, quoted here as he translates it, as an epigraph on p. 6. For the distinction between “power” and “glory,” see p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> See the editor’s introduction to *Niccolo Machiavelli: Selected Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), xxii.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Palmer, *Masters and Slaves: Revisioned Essays in Political Philosophy* (New York: Lexington Books, 2001), 82–83.

Hanna Pitkin, Terrence Ball, and Russell Price, among others, conclude that he means to condemn the Sicilian for excessive violence despite the latter's political success.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, J. G. A. Pocock sees Agathocles as an exemplar of "pure criminality."<sup>9</sup>

It is remarkable, and characteristic of Machiavelli, that a story occupying a total of only three paragraphs in *The Prince* provides such defensible grounds for such opposite views. This essay argues that the story of Agathocles must be understood in the context not merely of what Machiavelli says but also of what he deliberately omits. Chapter VIII of *The Prince* constructs a tale of a heroic and successful leader who conquers fortune and rules over a secure empire. Yet the historical and poetic sources on which Machiavelli drew to tell the story actually show Agathocles to have been the very model of a Machiavellian failure: a prince whose gratuitous cruelties led to his empire's collapse.

Machiavelli's motives for placing his own gloss on the story may be myriad and diverse, but there are also many reasons to believe the story leans in the direction of encouraging rather than economizing violence, this foremost among them: were his purpose to discourage violence, no warning could be more convincing than the historical and poetic account of Agathocles's gruesome demise atop a pyre where he was placed alive by enemies resentful of his cruelty.<sup>10</sup> Machiavelli's Agathocles, in turn, must be read in comparison with Machiavelli's Oliverotto da Fermo, who much more closely resembles the Agathocles of his historical sources: a man undone by his excessive cruelties.

It is the portrait of these together that suggests Machiavelli's intent: to encourage the *prudent* use of violence, but to encourage it nonetheless. If Machiavelli means to establish an "economy of violence," it would appear to be an inflationary one.

<sup>8</sup> J. T. Scott and Vickie Sullivan, "Patricide and the Plot of *The Prince*: Cesare Borgia and Machiavelli's Italy," *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 4 (1994): 887–900; Hanna Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 60–61; Terrence Ball, "The Picaresque Prince: Reflections on Machiavelli and Moral Change," *Political Theory* 12, no. 4 (1984): 521–36; Russell Price, "The Theme of Gloria in Machiavelli," *Renaissance Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (1977): 611.

<sup>9</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 152.

<sup>10</sup> Diodorus 21.16. See *Diodorus of Sicily*, trans. Russel M. Geer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954). The account of Agathocles is dispersed through vols. 9–11. The account of his death (in book 21) is located in vol. 11.

## II

The story of Agathocles is located in a brace of chapters—VI through IX—in which Machiavelli discusses the modes by which princes attain their offices. Chapter VIII is entitled “Of Those Who Have Attained a Principality through Crimes [*Scelleratezze*],” and it unfolds the story of Agathocles roughly as follows: Agathocles, the son of a potter, rose from low rank to become praetor of Syracuse, at which point he “decided to become prince and to hold with violence and without anyone else that which had been conceded to him by agreement.” Consequently, Agathocles called an assembly of the people and Senate at which he had the nobles of Syracuse slaughtered. “Once they were dead, he seized and held the principate of that city without any civil controversy.”<sup>11</sup>

Machiavelli acknowledges that Agathocles was “defeated twice by the Carthaginians,” but attributes to him the daring feat of relieving a siege by escaping and attacking the enemy on its own territory in Africa, which secured Syracuse’s independence. This result makes Agathocles a laudable illustration of what Machiavelli hopes for the cities of Italy: attaining independence from foreign invaders by seizing control of fate rather than succumbing to it. “Thus, whoever might consider the actions and virtue [*virtù*] of this man will see nothing or little that can be attributed to fortune,”<sup>12</sup> which was the analytic category he had considered in the preceding chapter (“Of New Principalities That Are Acquired by Others’ Arms and Fortune”).

Yet Machiavelli quickly complicates this apparently laudatory treatment of Agathocles with a jarring passage in which he seems repeatedly to reverse course:

One cannot call it virtue to kill one’s citizens, betray one’s friends, to be without faith, without mercy, without religion; these modes can enable one to acquire empire, but not glory. For, if one considers the virtue of Agathocles in entering into and escaping from dangers, and the greatness of his spirit in enduring and overcoming adversities, one does not see why he has to be judged inferior to any most excellent captain. Nonetheless, his savage cruelty and inhumanity, together with his infinite crimes, do not permit him to be celebrated among the most excellent men [*non consentono che sia infra li eccellentissimi uomini celebrato*]. Thus, one cannot attribute to fortune or to virtue what he achieved without either.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Prince*, 34–35. I use Mansfield’s translation except where otherwise noted (Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey Mansfield [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998]).

<sup>12</sup> *Prince*, 35.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* For the Italian, see *Il Principe*, ed. C. Guerrieri-Crocetti (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1938), 53.

For Strauss, this reversal is accounted for by a shift in the meaning of virtue: "In the first case 'virtue' means moral virtue in the widest sense which includes religion, and in the second case it means cleverness and courage combined."<sup>14</sup> Machiavelli's use of the same word, "virtù," to describe both senses is responsible for the jarring nature of the passage. His treatment of Agathocles, as will be seen, will help us understand the distinction more fully. Agathocles emerges in this treatment as an exemplar of political virtù, whereas the private morality he is denied is precisely the obstacle to political success that Machiavelli seeks to overcome. He is commending, not condemning, Agathocles.

That is accentuated by the contrast between Agathocles and his modern counterpart in the chapter, Oliverotto da Fermo, whose story Machiavelli constructs as a deliberate and parallel foil. Agathocles was born of "low rank"; da Fermo was born an orphan. Both rose quickly through the military ranks. Agathocles decided to use violence to hold "without obligation what was conceded to him by agreement," a formulation that suggests he wished not to depend on the will of others. Here the stories begin to diverge, for da Fermo's motive for violence was that it "appeared to him servile to be at the level of others." He thus seized the city with the help of "certain citizens of Fermo to whom servitude was dearer than the liberty of their fatherland." Da Fermo, we learn, "had not troubled himself for anything but to acquire honor."

Thus their violence is described in strikingly different terms. Agathocles "kills" (*uccidere*) the nobles of the city, whereas da Fermo slays his uncle and family at a banquet in what Machiavelli describes as a "homicide" (*omicidio*)—a contrast that at a minimum places a gentler gloss on Agathocles's act and might be read to suggest that, despite the chapter's title, it was justified whereas only da Fermo's was criminal. Agathocles proceeds to hold his city without controversy for an unspecified duration; da Fermo's security, we are told, lasts for only a year. Their next actions suggest a clash of the very essence of Machiavellian success and failure: Agathocles seizes fortuna, escaping the Carthaginian siege to attack Carthage itself—Agathocles, again, owed nothing to fortune—whereas da Fermo was deceived, then publicly strangled, by Cesare Borgia.

Machiavelli returns to ask how Agathocles, "after infinite betrayals and cruelties, could live for a long time secure in his fatherland, defend himself against external enemies, and never be conspired against by his citizens." The

<sup>14</sup> Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 47.

answer, he says, lies in the distinction between cruelties used badly or well; the latter consist of those resorted to out of necessity, in the interest of the prince's subjects, and that are inflicted at one time and then ceased. Those who employ cruelty well "can have some remedy for their state with God and with men, as had Agathocles." By contrast, cruelties badly used "grow with time," making it "impossible for [those who use them] to maintain themselves."<sup>15</sup>

The problem is that the Agathocles of the poetic historians did not live "secure in his fatherland," had repeatedly to "defend himself against external enemies," and was most decidedly "conspired against by his citizens"—all of which Machiavelli knew.

### III

Indeed, the Agathocles of *The Prince* bears only a passing resemblance to the Agathocles recorded by two ancient historians on whom Machiavelli relied: Justin and Diodorus Siculus.<sup>16</sup> Their Agathocles, in fact, bears a much

<sup>15</sup> *Prince*, 37–38.

<sup>16</sup> For Justin's account of Agathocles, see *Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*, trans. J. C. Yardley (Atlanta: Scholars, 1994), books 22–23. For Diodorus, see *Diodorus of Sicily*, vols. 9–11. Machiavelli is affirmatively linked to Justin and Diodorus, but I cannot, of course, rule out the possibility of his acquaintance with another source that has been lost. In terms of surviving sources, the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* entry on Agathocles cites Justin, Diodorus, and Polyaeus as ancient sources. See *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. M. Cary et al. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949), s.v. The translations of Justin and Diodorus cited here cross-reference other ancient historians, including Athenaeus, Orosius, Appian, Arrian, and Frontinus, none of whose works, as best as I can ascertain, contain more than passing references to Agathocles. For Polyaeus, see *Strategies of War*, trans. R. Shepherd (Chicago: Ares, 1974). The ancient writer Dorus produced a multivolume biography of Agathocles that has since been lost to history.

At least five ancient historians—Livy, Plutarch, Polybius, Justin, and Diodorus Siculus—offer accounts of Agathocles. The only clue Machiavelli supplies as to his source is contained in a passing reference in 2.12 of the *Discourses*: "[Livy] also cites Agathocles, who, though unable to sustain the war at home, assaulted the Carthaginians who were waging it against him and reduced them to asking for peace." But Livy's only reference to Agathocles is a brief quotation from a much later debate between Fabius and Scipio in which the latter briefly invokes the Sicilian as an illustration of an unrelated point (Titus Livy, *The History of Rome*, vol. 4, trans. Canon Roberts [New York: Dutton, 1912], 28.43; text online at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu>). The quotation contains neither the detailed narrative Machiavelli offers in *The Prince* nor the specific claim in the *Discourses* that Agathocles forced Carthage to ask for peace. Machiavelli also cites Plutarch repeatedly in the *Discourses*—on other topics—but that historian's work, like Livy's, refers to Agathocles only in passing and in no detail. Neither Livy nor Plutarch, it seems, can be Machiavelli's sole source. Of the remaining three historians, only Polybius validates Machiavelli's portrait of the Sicilian as an initially ruthless but ultimately effective leader: "Is it not universally stated by the historians that Agathocles, tyrant of Sicily, after having the reputation of extreme cruelty in his original measures for the establishment of his dynasty, when he had once become convinced that his power... was firmly established, is considered to have become the most humane and mild of rulers?" (*The Histories of Polybius*, vol. 1, trans. Evelyn S. Shuckburgh

stronger likeness to Machiavelli's da Fermo. Machiavelli is textually linked to both Justin and Diodorus. Giuseppe Lisio notes, as does Palmer, that the first several words of Machiavelli's biographical account—Agathocles was “born of a potter” (*nato d'uno figulo*)—precisely match the Latin in Justin's *Epitome* (*figulonus*).<sup>17</sup> Paul Sonnino attributes the story to Justin's influence as well.<sup>18</sup> Machiavelli's account broadly mirrors Justin's in structure, chronology, and language. Machiavelli, for example, joins Justin in referring to the Syracusan nobles as a “Senate,” as opposed to Diodorus, who describes them as “the Six Hundred.” Moreover, Justin is also apparently the only ancient historian who supplies a basis for Machiavelli's claim in *The Prince* that Agathocles notified Hamilcar the Carthaginian of his plans before slaughtering the Syracusan nobles.

Yet while the information Machiavelli supplies about Agathocles largely corresponds with Justin's narrative, he omits several decisive facts. Machiavelli introduces his subject as “Agathocles the Sicilian”; he is, to Justin, “Agathocles, *tyrant* of Sicily” (emphasis added). Machiavelli describes Agathocles rising “through the [military] ranks to become praetor of Syracuse,” a narrative that tracks Justin's but omits a sordid story in the interim. In Justin's telling, Agathocles demonstrates military prowess, but is so greedy he “engaged in piracy against his own country... Twice he attempted to make himself sovereign of Syracuse; and twice he was driven into exile.” During that period, Agathocles became praetor of an enemy city and laid siege to Syracuse. When the siege failed, Agathocles asked Hamilcar of Carthage to arrange peace.

Here Machiavelli's telling corresponds briefly with Justin, who relates the slaughter of the Syracusan nobles. Both report two defeats of Agathocles at the hands of Carthage, then the latter's siege of Syracuse. But Machiavelli does not mention, as Justin does, that Agathocles's position in the siege was worsened because he was “deserted... by his allies, who were disgusted at his cruelties,” a detail that would violate *The Prince*'s standard of “cruelties well used.” Justin and Machiavelli agree in admiring Agathocles's audacity in taking the battle

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[Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962], 9.23). Polybius elsewhere presages Machiavelli's account by admirably noting the “great and admirable qualities, and many endowments” that must have been necessary for Agathocles to attain such heights (Polybius 12.15, in *Histories*, vol. 2, trans. Shuckburgh). But these passing references occur only in the context of Polybius's own broadsides against another historian—Timaeus—and do not account for the detail of chapter VIII.

<sup>17</sup> Giuseppe Lisio, *Il Principe di Niccolò Machiavelli con Commento Storico, Filologico e Stilistico* (Florence: Sansoni, 1900), 57n5. For the English rendering of Machiavelli used above, see *Prince*, 34; for the Italian, see *Principe*, 51.

<sup>18</sup> *The Prince*, trans. Paul Sonnino (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1996).

to Carthage. But Machiavelli terminates the story at this point, thereby radically altering its character. As Justin tells the tale, Agathocles's troops mutiny against him, a rebellion he briefly quells only to lose the army's support again for "commencing an engagement [against the enemy] too rashly, los[ing] the greater part of his force." Agathocles sneaks out of camp at midnight, leaving behind his sons, whom the troops subsequently execute. This is, Justin says, "a signal instance of dishonourable conduct, a prince deserting his army, and a father abandoning his children." Agathocles's army surrenders to Carthage, which in turn sends its armies back into Sicily. It is only at this point that "Agathocles [makes] peace with them on equal terms." Machiavelli suggests that Agathocles was able to make such a peace because of his daring invasion of Carthage; the clear sense in Justin is that he was forced into equal terms from a position of weakness brought about by his own treachery.

Justin writes that Agathocles later attempted to invade the Italian mainland from Sicily, only to contract a horrific and lethal disease, prompting a succession struggle in which his son was murdered by his grandson. He then died in "a forlorn condition...a sick old man [who] lament[s] that his offspring, born to the prospect of a throne, should be left in want." Carthage reacts to his death by invading Sicily and destroying several cities—the collapse of Agathocles's empire.

In sum, the Agathocles of *The Prince* is a paragon of Machiavellian virtù, having done for Syracuse precisely what Machiavelli hopes the Medicis will do for Italy: repelling foreign invaders and establishing independence. Justin's Agathocles, by contrast, forces himself on Syracuse with the help of one of the city's enemies, collects more enemies precisely because of his cruelty and impetuosity, and fails to plan for the success of his regime after his death—the very lapse that plagues Cesare Borgia in the preceding chapter of *The Prince*. The difference is that Borgia's early death (the duke falls ill) is attributable to fortuna; by Machiavellian standards, Agathocles can clearly be faulted for not planning for his by ensuring a peaceful succession.

The narrative of Diodorus Siculus, the other historian on whom Machiavelli relies, makes these omissions even more acute. Several commentators have observed that Diodorus's larger-than-life portrait of Agathocles apparently forms the basis of Machiavelli's highly embellished portrayal in the *Life of Castruccio*. Several of the two men's escapades are strikingly similar: both are rescued from exposure as infants; both are endowed with precocious

military skills and uncommon handsomeness; both take power by meeting with their enemies and giving a sudden signal to murder them.<sup>19</sup>

Diodorus's account largely comports with Justin's but supplies an array of sordid details that cast Agathocles in an even more unfavorable light. He introduces the narrative with a commentary on those "who destroy democracies," of whom Agathocles, "who became tyrant of the Syracusans," is paradigmatic. Diodorus's telling of Agathocles's cruelties makes them sound anything but economic:

For example, he used to punish a private individual by slaughtering all his kindred, and to exact reckoning from cities by murdering the people from youth up; and on account of a few who were charged with a crime, he would compel the many, who had done no evil at all, to suffer the same fate, condemning to death the entire population of cities.

This gratuitous cruelty was in evidence in the aftermath of Agathocles's murder of the nobles. Contrast this passage in Diodorus—in which he describes the murder extending indiscriminately beyond the oligarchs to anyone whose property could be plundered—with Machiavelli's claim that Agathocles ruled after that episode "without any civil controversy":

One could see the whole city filled with outrage, slaughter, and all manner of lawlessness.... All the gates of the city were closed, and more than four thousand persons were slain on that day whose only crime was to be of gentler birth than the others. Of those who fled, some who rushed for the gates were arrested, while others who cast themselves from the walls escaped to the neighbouring cities; some, however, who in panic cast themselves down before they looked, crashed headlong to their doom.... The party of Agathocles spent the day in murder of their fellow citizens, nor did they abstain from outrage and crime against women, but they thought that those who had escaped death would be sufficiently punished by the violation of their kindred.

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<sup>19</sup> See *The History of Florence and Other Selections*, ed. Myron P. Gilmore (New York: Washington Square, 1970). The links include the story of his exposure as an infant, Machiavelli's lavish descriptions of his precocious soldierly skills and beautiful appearance, and Castruccio's assault on Pistoia, which he describes in a manner similar to Agathocles's slaughter of the Syracusan nobles. For the connection between Diodorus and *Castruccio*, see, inter alia, Pasquale Villari, *Niccolo Machiavelli and His Times*, vol. 4, trans. Linda Villari (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1883), 85–86. That claim was the topic of dispute in the mid-twentieth century. J. H. Whitfield does not deny the connection entirely but does argue that its usefulness is limited for purposes of understanding the *Life of Castruccio*. See Whitfield, "Machiavelli and Castruccio," *Italian Studies* 8, no. 1 (1953): 11–12. In any case, this essay is concerned merely with establishing a connection between Machiavelli and Diodorus, not with exegesis of *Castruccio* or the particular claim of influence on that work. Even were the connection between Machiavelli and Diodorus disproved, the link with Justin remains.

This last detail is especially significant, because it shows Agathocles violating Machiavelli's specific warning in chapter XVII of *The Prince*, which famously counsels rulers that it is better to be feared than loved—but

in such a mode that if he does not acquire love, escapes hatred.... This he will always do if he abstains from the property of his citizens and his subjects, and from their women; and if he also needs to proceed against someone's life, he must do it when there is suitable justification and manifest cause for it.<sup>20</sup>

The reason the prince should not engage in gratuitous cruelty is that engendering hatred also creates enemies, in which case it may backfire. This is a constant theme of Diodorus's Agathocles. At the time of the siege of Syracuse, the city so teemed with enemies of Agathocles that he found it necessary to separate relatives from one another, invite those incapable of enduring the siege to leave with their property, then pursue and slaughter them, confiscating their belongings. Far from committing cruelties all at once to establish his rule, Diodorus portrays Agathocles as having to engage in them repeatedly, such as throwing banquets at which he served copious amounts of wine, invited Syracusans to speak against his tyranny, then murdered those who did—a tactic that indicates Agathocles's rule was never secure, even years after he became praetor.

#### IV

The striking feature of these accounts of Agathocles is that they bear all the stigmata of Machiavellian failure. Machiavelli's criteria here are explicit and unforgiving: according to chapter XV of *The Prince*—"Of Those Things for Which Men and Especially Princes Are Praised or Blamed"—princes are to be praised for preserving their states and blamed for losing them. Yet Agathocles loses his empire in precisely the way Machiavelli warns empires can be lost: by excessive cruelty and plunder. Similarly, having laid siege to his own city in order to take its helm—an episode Machiavelli conceals—Agathocles's patriotism seems opportunistic at best. And Agathocles, described by both ancient authors as a "tyrant," is far from an archetype of the civic republicanism that commentators like Pocock detect in Machiavelli.

Machiavelli's changes of these accounts are best understood as variations on poetic themes. Machiavelli often varies such accounts to support

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<sup>20</sup> *Prince*, 67.

the points he wishes to make. The question is what those purposes are in the case of Agathocles. The variation magnifies both the condemnatory and the redemptive interpretations of Agathocles—what might be called the “even though” and “even Agathocles” readings. According to the former, Agathocles is ultimately condemned despite his political success, a message Machiavelli must, of course, establish his political success to convey. On the other reading, which also requires the falsification, even Agathocles, an exemplar of outsized cruelties, can be redeemed by political success.

Victoria Kahn has argued perceptively that the ambiguity serves to test the reader: those capable of rising to the Machiavellian challenge will see it as licensing necessary violence, while those who lack the stomach for cruelty—and who therefore cannot use it effectively—will be dissuaded.<sup>21</sup> The falsification of Agathocles, however, undermines the second message by portraying the tyrant ultimately as a success. Were Machiavelli's intent to discourage cruelty, he need only have revealed Agathocles's poetic fate. By contrast, the whitewash conduces to the first message—encouraging rather than discouraging the prudent use of violence.

On Machiavelli's retelling of antiquity, then, restrained violence can succeed. However, Machiavelli can be read to hold that it must be adorned in philosophical robes—required by fortuna, licensed by virtù—to conceal its true nature. On this account, Agathocles could be understood as having failed insofar as he did not conceal his violence and therefore acquired a reputation as a criminal. Yet Machiavelli's reframing of the story militates against such a reading. Machiavelli does the concealing for Agathocles; he directs the reader's attention away from instances of criminality and toward political virtue. Had Machiavelli intended to censure Agathocles for failing to conceal his violence, it would have made more sense to magnify it.

While Agathocles as opposed to da Fermo is able to apportion his cruelties prudently, nearly everything about the story nonetheless reads as an exhortation to violence, even if economized, an account that is only amplified by portraying him as a victor flush with Machiavellian virtù while concealing the ruinous consequences of his cruelties. Significantly, the only specific example of cruelties that Machiavelli provides—the “killing” (again, not “homicide”) of the Syracusan nobles—serves a political purpose that is clearly excusable on Machiavellian grounds. The accounts of Justin and Diodorus

<sup>21</sup> Victoria Kahn, “Virtù and the Example of Agathocles in Machiavelli's *Prince*,” in *Machiavelli and the Discourse of Literature*, ed. Albert Russell Ascoli and Victoria Kahn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 195–217.

indicate that had Machiavelli wanted to portray Agathocles as inhumane, he had far more gruesome illustrations from which to draw. Yet Machiavelli specifically conceals these cruelties from the reader's view. This omission is complemented by several others, each of which, as has been seen, obscures a specific instance of behavior that violates Machiavelli's counsel to princes: violating rights of property, behaving so cruelly as to trigger a backlash, and so forth. In addition, Machiavelli concludes the chapter's account of Agathocles on a clearly redemptive note: those who use cruelties well "can have some remedy for their state with God and with men, as had Agathocles."<sup>22</sup>

Condemnatory readings tend to rely on quotations excerpted from the full context of the story and that, on closer inspection, read ambiguously at best. Most of these appear in a longer passage that we have already encountered: "Yet one cannot call it virtue [*Non si può ancora chiamare virtù*] to kill one's citizens. . ."<sup>23</sup> Taken in isolation, some of this passage does seem to condemn Agathocles. But especially in the broader context of the passage, it becomes evident that Machiavelli is not speaking for himself when he notes that his cruelties "do not permit him to be celebrated among the most excellent men [*non consentono che sia infra li eccellentissimi uomini celebrato*]."<sup>24</sup> Instead, he is lamenting the very same conventional moral standards *The Prince* means to reverse, and speaking in particular to the distinction between private morality and political virtù on which Strauss places emphasis. In Italian, the apparently condemnatory passages employ the passive voice. The beginning of the passage (*Non si può ancora chiamare virtù*) can be translated as "It cannot yet be called virtue." In other words, *under conventional mores*, Agathocles's actions "cannot" be called virtuous. Far from condemning Agathocles, Machiavelli is reorienting the prince to a political standard of virtue that stands outside humanity—in other words, outside the standard of what makes one a good human being.

Similarly, it is misguided conventional standards of personal morality, not Machiavelli's standards of political virtue, that "do not permit [Agathocles] to be celebrated among the most excellent men." The fact that Machiavelli refers to conventional standards of morality, not his own views, is rendered clearer in chapter XVII, in which he explicitly says a prince should not care about "the infamy of cruelty." Moreover, "of all princes, it is impossible for a

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<sup>22</sup> *Prince*, 38.

<sup>23</sup> *Prince*, 35. For the Italian, see *Il Principe*, 58.

<sup>24</sup> *Prince*, 35.

new prince to escape a *name* for cruelty”—that is, a reputation for it according to contemporary moral standards.<sup>25</sup> Again, chapter XVII continues, the prince of a military regime should not care about “a *name* for cruelty.”<sup>26</sup> In all these cases, including that of Agathocles, Machiavelli is talking about problems of perception created by moral standards that do not, or should not, apply in the political realm.<sup>27</sup>

The same is true of Machiavelli's remark that cruel methods can enable one to acquire “empire but not glory.” Quentin Skinner understands that passage to deny Agathocles gloria. That is true but not, in Machiavelli's eyes, condemnatory, since in the context of the passage, gloria, as opposed to empire, would arise from the standards of private morality rather than political virtue. The point is underscored by the fact that chapter XVII of *The Prince* attributes “glory” to Scipio despite what Machiavelli describes as his weakness, a clear reference to what *The Prince* sees as warped contemporary standards.<sup>28</sup> In other words, the denial of glory to Agathocles does not indicate Machiavelli's condemnation any more than the attribution of it to Scipio signals Machiavelli's praise. This reading is buttressed by the obvious sense of the intervening sentence: the claim that Agathocles should not be judged inferior to any other captain. The contrast Machiavelli draws is between an excellent “captain” and an excellent “man.” It is the latter distinction Agathocles is denied, but this can hardly be considered a condemnation from Machiavelli. On the contrary, *The Prince* warns that virtue for leaders is often different from what virtue would be in their personal lives, for “a man who wants to make a profession of good in all regards must come to ruin” in politics.<sup>29</sup> Man as man cannot, in other words, be good in all respects; political man must live beyond personal standards of good and evil. By these standards, the fact that Machiavelli describes Agathocles, whose responsibilities

<sup>25</sup> *Prince*, 65–66 (emphasis added).

<sup>26</sup> *Prince*, 67.

<sup>27</sup> Patrick Coby similarly says Machiavelli both accepts and “plays with” contemporary mores in his treatment of Agathocles. See Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans: Liberty and Greatness in the “Discourses on Livy”* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999), 233.

<sup>28</sup> Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 42. For the reference to Scipio, see *The Prince*, 68. Leo Paul S. de Alvarez also argues that Machiavelli denies Agathocles gloria on the grounds that both military and moral virtù is necessary to achieve it (Leo de Alvarez, *The Machiavelian Enterprise* [DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999], 39).

<sup>29</sup> *Prince*, 61. The strong suggestion is that there are inherent limits to the exercise of virtue in the human condition, or, put otherwise, that the man most deserving of glory may not be able to live fully constrained by conventional morality.

are fundamentally political, as an excellent captain rather than an excellent man must be read as praise rather than censure.<sup>30</sup>

The final sentence of the passage—“one cannot attribute to fortune or to virtue what he achieved without either”—also appears in the passive voice. The relevant phrase—*non si può*—can be translated as “it is not possible”: again, it is not possible *under conventional mores*, but the fact that it is not possible does not mean Machiavelli does not believe it would be preferable. Machiavelli here uses “virtù” in a double sense: the contrast is between false standards of virtue based on the private morality of excellent men and the genuine political virtue of excellent captains. More important, however, the overall context of *The Prince* shows this claim about Agathocles lacking fortune and virtue to be an analytic rather than a normative statement. Machiavelli’s intent is not to deny virtù to Agathocles. He does not in fact do so. His intent is to signal to the reader that the case of criminals (*scelleratezze*) occupies a different analytic category from the previous two chapters, whose titles refer to princes who have come to office by, respectively, virtue and fortune.<sup>31</sup>

By reading the passage in this holistic way, we can see that Machiavelli is commending Agathocles as a paragon of political virtue, not condemning him for a lack of private morality. To the extent he sounds, especially in translation, to be criticizing Agathocles, he refers to conventional moral standards that *The Prince* says repeatedly are not suited to the rough and tumble of the political world. This understanding of the passage has the advantage of rendering it reasonably consistent rather than a jarring series of sentences each of which seems to contradict the one before. To be sure, some self-contradiction and double dealing in Machiavelli would hardly be surprising, but read as a denunciation of Agathocles, the passage is all but incoherent. Machiavelli, then, does not engage in “equivocation” with respect to Agathocles, as he may seem to in translation.<sup>32</sup> His praise of Agathocles is far stronger, a fact that is especially clear in contrast to Machiavelli’s treatment of da Fermo, who bears striking resemblances to Agathocles but is ultimately a failure because—for

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<sup>30</sup> On the distinction between Machiavelli’s use of “man” and “captain,” see G. H. R. Parkinson, “Ethics and Politics in Machiavelli,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 5, no. 18 (1955): 44. Parkinson argues that Machiavelli means simultaneously to admire Agathocles as a ruler and condemn him as a man. The analysis above suggests these are simply separate categories. Machiavelli is not engaging in moral condemnation himself but rather describing how moral standards as opposed to political ones operate.

<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Machiavelli has adhered to a stark dichotomy between fortune and virtue to this point.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen M. Fallon, “Hunting the Fox: Equivocation and Authorial Duplicity in *The Prince*,” *PMLA* 107, no. 5 (1992): 1181–95.

lack of virtù—he fails to retain his political realm, precisely the mistake Agathocles has made yet Machiavelli has concealed from view. Da Fermo's mistake is cruelties poorly used—yet the sources on which Machiavelli relied could easily have been used to portray Agathocles in the same way.

After telling the story of da Fermo, Machiavelli returns to Agathocles to make this distinction between cruelties used well and badly. Agathocles occupies the former category, prompting Machiavelli to make a side remark that has also been understood as censorious: “Those [cruelties] can be called well used (if it is permissible to speak well of evil) that are done at a stroke... and then are not persisted in.”<sup>33</sup> Yet, again, Machiavelli is not calling Agathocles's deeds “evil” in his own voice; he refers instead to conventional morality: if it is permissible *under current moral standards* to “speak well of [the] evil” of which the Sicilian tyrant makes use. Moreover, the English translation obscures what in Italian comes off as a playful and euphonious pun: *se del male è lecito dire bene*... The antithesis between *male* and *bene* is lost in translation. Alternatively, the passage could be translated, “if it is legitimate to speak well of evil as good.”

## V

Yet a difficulty arises. The prince who gets a taste of cruelty may develop a palate for it. More benignly, if he misapprehends the example of Agathocles, he may conclude he has no choice but to engage in it wantonly or selfishly. Therein lies the importance of the story of da Fermo, the modern counterpart to Agathocles. Again, the similarities to Agathocles are both deliberate and conspicuous. In fact, it might even be said that the dissimilarities—what exactly leads one to the success Machiavelli asserts for Agathocles and the other to da Fermo's public strangulation—are obscure.

Why the difference? We are not informed of any sustained cruelties on the part of da Fermo, so by Machiavellian standards, he cannot be accused of excessive violence. The difference, and it is a vital one, appears to be in the presentation of motive. Whereas Agathocles defends the independence of his city, da Fermo's concern is solely for his personal glory. “It appeared to him servile to be at the level of others.... [He] had not troubled himself for anything but to acquire honor.”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *Prince*, 38.

<sup>34</sup> *Prince*, 36.

Da Fermo, then, and not Agathocles, is Machiavelli's cautionary tale. The chapter is structured to provide one exhortation and one restraint. The story of Agathocles encourages the prudent employment of violence for the public good; the tale of da Fermo warns against its selfish, and therefore inherently excessive, use. But the alteration of Agathocles from the historical accounts on which Machiavelli relied strongly militates against reading his story in chapter VIII as a warning to the excessively violent modern prince. Instead, its audience is apparently a prince who is sufficiently politically skilled to respond to Machiavelli's message but who feels restrained by conventional morality from using cruelty: that is, one who may feel constrained to act as an excellent man when his ambition should be to be an excellent captain. To the otherwise talented ruler who may be disposed to shrink from violence when it is necessary, Machiavelli is, in effect, issuing a license to kill. He may have in mind someone much like his failed patron Piero Soderini, who, according to the *Discourses*, possessed political skill but was unwilling at the crucial moment, whether because of weakness, Christian morality, or an eliding of the two, to forsake his moral gentility in favor of the violence necessary to suppress his enemies.<sup>35</sup> This is not to say, of course, that Machiavelli's Christian Europe is free of violence—far from it; a Christian prince might well be more violent than an ancient pagan—but he clearly believes a strain of Christian piety would render contemporary princes unable at the crucial moment to be decisively and necessarily cruel. The violence Machiavelli encourages is, to be sure, constrained within strict limits—da Fermo stands as a warning against its inappropriate use—but it nonetheless matters whether we interpret him as approaching those limits with the intent to license or to restrain.<sup>36</sup> The story of Agathocles leans clearly against restraint, and he seems to have written it with the excessively virtuous prince—virtuous in the sense of Christian morality—and not the excessively violent one, in mind.

That orientation is evident in Machiavelli's concluding exhortation in chapter XXVI, which is rhetorically geared to encourage rather than restrain violent measures to the extent they are politically necessary. Its target is someone reluctant to employ them. They are words one would direct to the reluctant, not the eager. They are words that would be compelling to the prince Machiavelli has in mind earlier when he warns:

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<sup>35</sup> *Discourses*, 3.9, 3.30.

<sup>36</sup> The fictionalization may serve a political purpose as well. Machiavelli exhorts the Medici to do for mainland Italy what he says Agathocles did for Sicily. Knowing his disastrous end would not be encouraging to them.

And men have less hesitation to offend one who makes himself loved than one who makes himself feared; for love is held by a chain of obligation, which, because men are wicked, is broken at every opportunity for their own utility, but fear is held by a dread of punishment that never forsakes you.<sup>37</sup>

Fear, of course, must be prudently administered too, as da Fermo's story warns. But while hatred should be avoided, violence cannot be forsaken as a necessary political tool. Perhaps, then, it is significant that, in a letter to his friend Vettori around the time he composes *The Prince*, Machiavelli says of Lorenzo di Piero de Medici, the young duke to whom he ultimately addresses the work: "In sum, he makes himself both loved and revered rather than feared."<sup>38</sup> Superficially, to be sure, the letter reads like no more than a glowing compliment from a job seeker eager to ingratiate himself with the Medici family, and there are ample reasons to believe Machiavelli does not view Lorenzo as the redeemer he seeks. But the striking parallel to *The Prince*—especially one penned contemporaneously with that work—is difficult to overlook. For Machiavelli, the prince should ideally aspire to be both loved *and* feared. And whomever Machiavelli means to address, the essential import of the analysis above remains: that person seems to reside in a political environment in which cruelty is thought to be personally vicious, but in which the Florentine sometimes believes it to be politically necessary. Its tacit message—one Machiavelli alters poetic accounts of history to convey—seems to provide a final reassurance to the prince who questions the morality of violence: *Even Agathocles* was morally redeemed. If your cruelties are used as well and prudently as his purportedly were, you may be redeemed as well. Put otherwise, it is an excellent captain, rather than an excellent man, the political leader should aspire to be.

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<sup>37</sup> *Prince*, 66–67.

<sup>38</sup> Sebastian de Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 42.



## Review Essay

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José Colen and Elisabeth Dutartre-Michaut, eds., *The Companion to Raymond Aron*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 320pp., \$110.00 (hardcover).

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Prescient and judicious Raymond Aron stood firm in his defense of liberal republicanism in exactly those decades when the regimes of liberty so desperately needed every courageous, independent voice they could find. And he did that in France—central to Nazi and Soviet Communist schemes for the domination of Europe—when so many of his fellow intellectuals sided with the enemy. At precisely the time when so many brilliant men and women supposed that “the center will not hold,” Aron saw that it could.

Aron’s large and many-sided body of writings may well need many minds to help his readers understand them. This collection has the merit of bringing together not only the American, French, and German scholars we might anticipate but also several very able Portuguese Aronians (including the lead editor) whose work will not likely be known to Anglophone readers.

In his foreword to the volume, Aron’s most prominent contemporary student, Pierre Manent, rightly calls his mentor “a very rare bird, a theoretical man who took very seriously the realm of action” (ix). Aron sought to develop a theory of action—he called it a “praxeology”—but did so in opposition to philosophers who attempt in effect to unite theory and practice and who claim “that the innumerable human actions in the past constitute a coherent system that gives us the clue to future human actions” (x) in accordance

with discernible and deterministic historical laws modeled on similar laws in physics and chemistry. In France, Marxism was the best known of these systems, but Aron also identified Auguste Comte's positivism as another example of such "necessitarian thinking" aimed at ending the course of history and indeed the need for politics by "substitut[ing] the administration of things for the governing of men" (x). Manent identifies two "theoretical endeavors" Aron undertook to establish his praxeology: first, the elaboration of a regime theory that accounted for the kinds of political orders seen in the twentieth century, an effort that involved him in an amendment but also a continuation of the work of Aristotle and Montesquieu; second, an account of political *disorder*, as seen in international, that is also to say interregime, relations. Here, Thucydides and Clausewitz proved useful.

Nicolas Baverez, a French attorney who teaches at the National School of Administration, and who has authored what is widely regarded as the definitive biography of Aron, elaborates on these themes in the first article, in which he narrates Aron's intellectual journey. Born in 1905 to a "fully integrated, patriotic, and republican" French-Jewish family, Aron saw his country survive World War I, "which marked the suicide of liberal Europe" (3). In the 1920s he became a friend of Jean-Paul Sartre and Paul Nizan, fellow students at the *École normale supérieure*, and the three of them would go on to study Heidegger and Husserl, taking the first step toward French existentialism. Aron thus turned away from "the idealism and positivism that then dominated the Sorbonne" (5), living in Germany between 1930 and 1933, where he not only read the phenomenologists and Max Weber but saw the rise of Nazism. Although Sartre arrived in Germany around the same time, he didn't seem to pay as much attention to Germany's political agony; one suspects that Aron was more alert politically, less inclined toward abstraction than his friend. Being Jewish, he could scarcely have overlooked Hitler's poisonous animosity. With Élie Halévy, Aron was "among the first to highlight the novelty of, and the common traits linking, Fascism, Nazism, and Communism, their common opposition to democracy, and the lack of any solution other than war to the challenge they presented" (5). He fought the Germans when they invaded in 1940, then joined the Free French organization of Charles de Gaulle, remaining with the Gaullists for a time after the war when the celebrated novelist André Malraux aligned himself with the Gaullist project; Aron served under Malraux in the Ministry of Information during the short-lived de Gaulle administration of 1946. He remained Malraux's ally during the early years of the Cold War, when both men broke publicly with the French Left and joined the Gaullist party. The

by-then-fashionable Sartre disapproved, and “from 1947 to 1955, [Aron] was a lonely man”—an antifascist anticommunist in Paris, writing newspaper articles on international politics and eventually finding a position at the Sorbonne, where he was elected (by a margin of one vote) to a chair in sociology. Eventually he broke with the Gaullists, too, regarding the general’s policy of quasi independence from the Atlantic Alliance, implemented after his founding of the Fifth Republic in 1958, as impractical; Aron remained a confirmed Atlanticist, strongly supporting NATO, until his death in 1983.

Baverez distinguishes Aron from Sartre not only on the political issue of communism but more fundamentally on his understanding of political freedom. While both “are philosophers of freedom and commitment,” Aron identified the bases of freedom in practical political action in defense of republicanism and its institutions, whereas Sartre claimed that human “consciousness” has become so radically alienated from, and by, the conditions of modern life that it can free itself only by violent, collective revolt, “welded by a pact of mutual terror” (8). Thus Sartre could admire a thinker like Maurice Merleau-Ponty and his book *Humanism and Terror*, when Aron regarded such valorizations of political violence as a fascism of the Left. At the same time, Aron rejected the utilitarian liberalism of another well-known contemporary, Friedrich von Hayek, with its faith in free markets; again, *political* life mattered for Aron in a way that it fundamentally did not for the main line of French existentialists—who were rather reminiscent of the literary intellectuals who gave France the Terror in the 1790s—or for the libertarians, who maintained that economics mattered more than politics. Later on, as “one of the first theorists to recognize the global age” (11) that combined capitalism, technology, and geopolitical multipolarity, Aron never succumbed to dreams of an “end of history”—even as he did envision an eventual end of the Cold War.

If not historicism or existentialism, what formed the foundation of Aron’s understanding of right? Baverez argues that it was Kantianism; reason was “a hidden universal,” although not identical to any historicized dialectic (10). That is, reason provides a moral standard, a source of political right that is neither itself historical nor a species of natural right. But this raises an obvious question: If, as Baverez and Manent both acknowledge, Aron put a premium on prudential reasoning, where does that leave Kantianism—a philosophy of right in which prudence plays a decidedly subordinate role? Not for Aron plans for perpetual peace under a league of nations. The first of the book’s three main sections addresses the question of right as it manifests

itself in international relations, the realm self-named “realists” describe as an amoral war of all against all.

Jean-Vincent Holeindre, a political scientist at the University of Poitiers, offers the first of the six essays in this group. Holeindre finds the link between Aron’s theory of war and his political thought generally in his understanding of history or the course of events as a series of *examples* of human freedom and unfreedom, not as a teleological march towards a projected realm of absolute freedom. Initially a follower of Émile-Auguste Chartier, a pacifist philosopher who wrote under the pen name of Alain, Aron rejected pacifism when he witnessed the rise of modern tyranny or “totalitarianism”; at the same time, he never went to the opposite extreme of the self-described “realist” school, which inclined toward treating all states in the international system alike, regardless of their regimes. International politics, he decided, was simply too variegated a thing to be brought into the domain of any systematic theory. Although each country typically had a regime to give it sufficient internal coherence to permit theorizing, international politics could be understood better in the terms offered by Carl von Clausewitz—namely, as the clash of regimes bent on advancing the characteristic interests of each regime. This is the sense in which war is political: not that it involves the give-and-take, the ruling-and-being-ruled of political life, but that it serves regime purposes. Insofar as international politics does amount to a war of all against all, every “each” within the “all” has a regime; its regime may be better or worse than another; who wins any given war matters, morally.

Holeindre observes that “totalitarianism reversed Clausewitz’s formula both in theory and practice” (23) because it used war as an instrument of terror complementary to its domestic use of terror, as means both to attempt to remake human beings and to overcome politics itself. Aron saw that the democratic republics were *not* helpless in the face of this project, if they refused pacifist surrender and the total war of the tyrants. Nuclear weapons—seemingly the ultimate technological challenge to limitations on war—in fact gave new life to the practice of limited war for political ends in defense of republicanism because, in Aron’s formulation, they made a major war improbable even as the persistence of regime conflict made peace improbable. The increased frequency of small wars under conditions of nuclear standoff came as no surprise to Aron, who understood it as a tactic of the weak against the strong and, simultaneously, as a tactic the strong could encourage in wars fought by their proxy allies among the weak against their strong enemies. Aron saw that it was precisely in alliances between strong states and weak

states, or weak nonstate groups, that strong states might overbear their strong rivals without destruction in a nuclear war.

University of Potsdam historian Matthias Opperman connects Aron's witness of the disastrous politics of late Weimar Germany with a moral foundation for his newfound antipacifism: the ethic of responsibility seen in Max Weber, another thinker he studied in those years. Aron eventually came to reject Weber's complementary notion of a "value-free" social science, and therewith the Weberian distinction between facts and values. But his focus on sociological problems, taken from Weber, had a double effect: it got him away from naive notions of historical progress founded upon German Idealism and focused his mind on the concrete, practical problems that a citizen intent on resisting modern tyranny would need to address. At the same time, Aron didn't identify the crisis of liberalism so much with the underlying principles of modern philosophy, as Leo Strauss ("whom Aron had met at the end of his stay in Berlin and whom he greatly admired later on") would do (34). Instead, he began a lifelong interest in addressing the question he would repeat throughout his life: "What should the cabinet minister *do*?" Aron inclined to take the statesman's perspective as more thoroughly dispositive of the right philosophic perspective than a Platonic political philosopher would do.

This statesman's perspective caused Aron to see Hitler's strategy much more clearly than many of his contemporaries in Europe and the United States. Hitler had read the English geopolitician Halford Mackinder: he wanted to rule the "Heartland," the European core of the "World Island" consisting of Europe itself, Asia, and Africa (38). Unlike the "realist" Mackinder, however, Aron never lost sight of the (as it were) moral-political motives for wanting to do such a thing, and Holeindre quotes Aron as saying that "true realism consists nowadays in acknowledging the effect of ideologies on diplomacy and strategy.... Nobody understands the diplomacy of a state without knowing the regime, without scrutinizing which philosophy motivates the political leaders of that state" (40). In the end, therefore, neither Kantian idealism nor Machiavellianism will suffice. "What tradition teaches," Aron wrote, "is not cynicism but Aristotelian prudence" (41).

Carlos Gaspar, a professor of international relations at Lusiadan University of Lisbon, shows how Aron exercised such prudence during the long Cold War, in which nationalities were suppressed in the European core within the two enemy blocs but were revived (and in some cases invented) in the periphery, now free of European imperial rule. The Cold War featured an overall stability punctuated by crises that reinforced the stability of the

overall balance of power, but Aron hardly found satisfaction in stability alone. Europe's subordination to the United States and the Soviet Union rankled, and while he didn't go so far as de Gaulle did in his invocations of nationality, he too wanted a more united Western Europe—a *Europe des patries*—to reassert its own interests in its own voice. Like de Gaulle and Churchill, he regarded Franco–West German reconciliation as central to such a project. He regarded the Soviets' 1956 invasion of Hungary as the beginning of the end of Soviet legitimacy—and ultimately of its imperial control—in Eastern Europe. The invasion “destroyed the credibility of Soviet communism for the coming generations” (53), and while US-Soviet alignment against Great Britain, France, and Israel in the Suez Crisis of the same year also showed that the two major powers had become “enemy brothers” in maintaining their rival hegemonies, the Soviet hegemon was likely to crack first.

But what has this astute analysis of Cold War practice to do with Aron's political theory, his praxeology? For this we must turn to his two major books, *Peace and War*, published in 1962, and *Clausewitz, Philosopher of War*, published in 1976.

Bryan-Paul Frost of the University of Louisiana-Lafayette emphasizes the sobriety of Aron's assessment of military strategy and international relations in the era of nuclear weapons. Against many of his contemporaries, Aron judged that “the fundamentals of human nature” and therefore of “international relations” had “not changed” (61). There had indeed been a technological revolution and also what Aron called a global extension of the diplomatic field—meaning that the two major powers had built alliance systems extending to every continent—but those two facts were logically unrelated. The blocs would have formed with or without the new weapons. This meant that the underlying logic of international politics remained what it had been on several previous occasions in human history: a bipolar balance of power. This in turn meant that tactics of deterrence, persuasion, and subversion came into play and that war remained the continuation of politics by other means, even if direct warfare between the two major powers was highly unlikely. “As a civic-minded theorist, Aron had to remind his audience—and especially the practitioners of politics—that the implicit logic of modern diplomacy was not revolutionary and could still be understood in the terms of Clausewitz” (64), a point that had the moral effect of calming citizens down and, as a consequence, enabling them to clear their minds for long-term thinking. Aron also worked to strengthen the resolve of the Western republics, recalling the pacifism of the interwar period and its malign

effects on the willingness to defend oneself. “The morality of prudence is a morality of responsibility” (65); the absolutist morality of pacifism, even under the dire threat of nuclear war, would neither prevent such war nor preserve republican liberty.

Again unlike so many of his peers, Aron did not turn to international organizations and international law as the core of peacemaking. Rather, “universal peace” could be achieved only with “the universality of republican regimes, the rigorous homogeneity of the international community, and the renunciation of the recourse to arms,” conditions Aron regarded as highly unlikely to be achieved in either “the near or distant future” (65). The Machiavellian insistence on the need for force in light of the persistence of human struggle and the Kantian desire for collective security and universal peace constituted an antimony that would not disappear “as long as states remain what they are” (66). At the same time, the virtues of moderation and prudence would never be replaced by any scientific-technological “fix” such as game theory; not only are there too many variables at play for any but the most probabilistic of calculations, but such things as glory, justice, prestige, and religion do not lend themselves to quantification (66–67). International relations can be thought about, rationally, but not in terms of *rationalism*, if that means the application of mathematical formulas. “All political claims inevitably contain a greater or lesser degree of justice, and...these assertions must be properly weighted, assessed, and appreciated by a prospective theorist” (67); such shortcuts to understanding as self-interest or power will not do. Looking back at French history, Aron observed that “Clemenceau sought the security, Napoleon the power, Louis XIV the glory of France” (68), a tripartite characterization that Aron did not hesitate to associate with the body (and the soul’s desire for its safety), the heart (and its desire to conquer, to be victorious), and the mind (the desire “to spread the idea of which the state represents a unique incarnation” [68]) of France. (This may be the only judicious application of Platonism to international politics.) Because, as in Plato and the other classical theorists, the division of the human soul expresses itself in the several political regimes, and human nature has not changed, a change in regime will likely result in a change in the relations of one country to another. Aron’s example par excellence in this regard remained Germany in the 1930s.

With fine irony, Frost observes, “Aron stood squarely against the dominant trends in international relations, and this, in part, helps to explain why he had such a limited impact on Anglo-American social science” (69). This

is most evident in the central section of *Peace and War*, where Aron eschews any attempt to “articulat[e] a system of interconnected hypotheses attempting to explain certain limited aspects of international relations” in the manner of Anglophone social scientists but instead points to perennial “variables of political life,” both material and moral (70). By keeping track of several material causes of international action (geography, demography, resources) and moral causes (regimes, civilizations, “human and social nature”), Aron avoided the errors of all monocausal systems, Marxism-Leninism (class) and Nazism (race) being the most lethal in his time (70–71). Instead of system building, Aron favored comparative and historical studies, exemplified by Montesquieu and Tocqueville. “By plunging sociological analysis back into history, Aron prevents his theoretical analysis from becoming too deterministic and abstract”—a Procrustean effort to fit facts into a simple set of supposed laws—“and by stepping back from the historical landscape, Aron avoids the mistake of claiming that international relations display no recurrent patterns of behavior” (72). It might be added that this methodological pluralism goes well with Aron’s social and political liberalism, which provides space for a variety of human “types” without succumbing to moral relativism.

Aron understood Clausewitz as the Montesquieu of military thought: so argues Joël Mouric, professor of history and geography at the University of Western Brittany. Although Ludendorff and Hitler on the right along with Lenin and Mao Zedong on the left were “avid readers of Clausewitz,” Aron was far from viewing them as competent readers. Considered in itself war lends itself to anything but moderation, but Aron understood that Clausewitz viewed it as a means to an end. Statesmen should undertake war for strategic purposes, for the sake of political ends, including the physical survival of their nations and the defense of their regimes.

During World War II, Aron worried that the Allies’ policy of unconditional surrender and their concomitant tactic of area bombing of Germany and Japan would stiffen resistance in both countries (he was right about that) and produce broken societies likely to prove fertile of tyranny in the years following the peace (on that he was wrong). During the Korean War he sided with President Truman against General Douglas MacArthur, that seeker of victory over North Korea. Both when right and when wrong, Aron favored limited war over total war as both wiser and more just. This inclination served him especially well during the Cold War, when his influence was at its height. With the two major powers deadlocked by their mutual possession of nuclear weapons, limited wars of attrition on the peripheries of their spheres

of influence would proliferate. In such wars, it is better to deal with the small enemy forces by limiting their depredations and not by attempting to bring them to justice. The latter policy will exhaust you. But this patient policy should never incline republican statesmen to imagine that their main enemy will somehow “come around”—as seen in the once-fashionable belief that liberal republicanism and communist oligarchy would *converge*, come together as fellow social democracies by each adopting the socialism of the communists and the representative institutions of the republics. That wasn’t in the cards, and Aron considered any strategy based upon such a synthesis another example of historical determinism—itsself a specimen of wishful thinking.

Mouric does a fine scholarly service by noticing that Aron learned from the nineteenth-century German scholar Hans Delbrück, who had launched (and lost) a strategic debate in Germany, taking the side of a limited-war, Clausewitzian strategy against the “strategy of annihilation” favored by other military thinkers (83). It was Delbrück who led Aron back to Clausewitz, who in turn gave Aron his argument against Carl Schmitt, whose military and political thought followed the Ludendorff-Hitler misinterpretation. The policy of Franco-German reconciliation depended on getting Clausewitz right, an insight Aron shared with de Gaulle. “Rehabilitating a Prussian liberal tradition, albeit a more conservative one, Aron supported the regime of the Federal Republic of Germany, which since 1956 he had described as a ‘peaceful democracy’” (85). De Gaulle concurred, and pursued rapprochement with FRG chancellor Konrad Adenauer at the first opportunity. For Aron, support for such a rapprochement followed from Aron’s early decision to abandon existentialist decisionism for Aristotelian prudentialism.

Carlos Gaspar contributes the last essay in the first section of the book, a discussion of Aron’s thoughts on the likely consequences of the end of Cold War bipolarity. The 1973 Yom Kippur War showed that the apparent US-Soviet condominium seen in the Suez Canal War no longer held. “At the crucial moment, no one remembered the rules of *détente* that were part of the code of conduct solemnly adopted by the United States and the Soviet Union at their last summit before the conflict” (92). In the years immediately following *détente* weakened further, as the Soviets attempted to take advantage of American reversals foreign (Vietnam) and domestic (Watergate). In Gaspar’s Portugal, in nearby Spain, and in Italy, the Communist Party seemed poised to make political gains. Soviet rulers decided that the correlation of forces in the world had shifted in their favor.

While Aron understood that the decline of Western Europe might be hard to reverse in the face of this new correlation, he distinguished sharply between decline and decadence. “Decline, as a decrease in the relative power of a given state, could be measured with quantitative rigor in its material dimension, while decadence was a qualitative change referring to Machiavelian *virtù*, to the ‘historical vitality’ of a political community, and to the state’s ‘capacity for collective action’” (93). So, the Europe of 1945 had declined in power but had not become decadent; Europeans still had plenty of fight left in them. But thirty years later Europe and perhaps America had suffered a loss of confidence, moral and intellectual confusion. Unlike decline, decadence can be remedied by an effort within the power of human souls, in part simply by refusing to give in to fear. Aron’s writings from this period—particularly his wryly titled *In Defense of Decadent Europe*—aimed at strengthening Europeans’ resolve and clarifying their minds.

No more than anyone else did Aron foresee the collapse of the Soviet regime in the twentieth century, although he did expect that collapse in the long run. Looking toward that moment, he remarked pointedly, “It is my view that the most important and indeed the most neglected question in contemporary International Relations scholarship is: what will the West do when and if the Soviets decline? How we answer this question will perhaps determine whether there will be war or peace in our time” (96).

If the first section of essays shows how Aron shifted from pacifism to just-war doctrine, from existentialism to prudentialism, it doesn’t quite explain the relationship between Aron’s putatively Kantian understanding of rights and that prudentialism. More, it doesn’t explain why the actual operation of reason in Kant’s moral theory, which issues in the categorical imperative, really functions in Aron’s thought. He does not actually seem to invoke the categorical imperative; in that case, where does that leave his alleged Kantianism? We turn to the second and central section of essays, “Theory, History, Philosophy: The Primacy of the Political,” with the hope of finding some suggested answers to this question, which evidently reaches to the core of his political thought.

As a historian, Perrine Simon-Nahum of L’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales doesn’t attempt an answer but rather digs back into Aron’s earliest writings, a 1935 study of Weber and his 1938 doctoral dissertation, in which he offered a critique of Hegelianism. Rejecting both positivism and historical teleology, Aron urged an understanding of the course of events seen in terms of the actions of the actors and their motives—taking his bearings

from Weberian responsibility, not Hegelian determinism. A historian should attempt to understand the circumstances in which the political actor operated so as to understand the choices available and then to judge whether that actor chose well. “Despite irreducible ambivalences, ambiguities, and contradictions, Aron maintained that intelligibility was within the historian’s grasp” (107). This implies, first, that there must be a human *nature* that a historian can recognize in a person who lived in another time; it also implies that the historian must take what amounts to a Socratic turn, attempt to know himself, to try to understand the “multiplicity of individual experiences of which each one refers to its own vision of the world.” The historian thus enjoys a certain “interpretive freedom”—an imagining oneself *into* the souls and circumstances of past actors—but also an austere restraint that takes the form of modesty, of knowing that one is after all limited by one’s own finite human fund of knowledge (110). Both that freedom and that restraint or modesty contrast sharply with the assumptions of philosophy-of-history historians, who effectively deny the possibility that one can understand past actors as they understood themselves (on grounds of relativity of historical knowledge, the supposed impossibility of truly knowing another historical “epoch”) and who, at the same time, confidently claim to understand *laws* of historical development or evolution, conceiving themselves thereby empowered to understand past actors in light of their place within that evolution. Simon-Nahum confirms the observation of previous contributors in remarking that this conception of history (and of social science) brought Aron to Thucydides and Clausewitz.

One might acknowledge the existence of human nature—and therefore of a historiography and a social science founded upon the study of human motives—without deriving moral or political *right* from it. The question of Aron’s derivation of right, the question of Aron’s stance as a political thinker or indeed philosopher, begins to be addressed more thoroughly in the essay by Institut Catholique-Paris political scientist Giulio De Ligio, which is one of the highlights of the volume. Since Plato, the analogy between the order of the soul and the order of the city has attracted philosophic attention. De Ligio writes, “The question of the political regime is at the heart of the work—and one could say the life—of Raymond Aron. The thinking of this French philosopher and sociologist demonstrates how and to what extent this question is at the heart of the human problem *qua* human problem” (119).

Aron understood human moral and political choices as philosophical—in the sense that they reflect nature—and historical/circumstantial,

in that they reflect (in the case of Aron himself) action constrained by the conditions of modernity. Although it had long been known that the *poleis* of antiquity acted as a direct result of their regimes—there being no meaningful distinction between “state” and “society” in such small places—what about the large modern states, in which civil-social and economic forces evidently rival political actions in their importance? Here De Ligio holds up an important finding: “As [Aron] himself wrote, if his *education* is neo-Kantian and owes much to German philosophy...his *conclusions* belong to a different spiritual family, or, one could say, to a tradition that prolongs an older political approach right at the heart of modernity: the school of Montesquieu and Tocqueville” (121). Even Weber, with his ethic of responsibility, fails to see the importance of the political regime to the degree that Montesquieu and Tocqueville saw it. Further, both philosophers carried on the Platonic and Aristotelian practice not merely of classifying and describing regimes but of judging them: Tocqueville, Aron maintained, “does not think that the ‘fact’ of a regime can be understood and described as an abstract apart from its ‘quality.’ The judgment of a regime is intrinsically linked to its description” (122). If sociology as an academic discipline had elevated society over politics, treating politics as epiphenomenal, Aron puts politics back in its place as a realm that is not determined by “more basic” phenomena such as economics and social groups. As in antiquity, the political structure or *politeia* of a community decisively shapes its *bios tis* or way of life. This is why two *modern* societies—say, France and Germany in 1939—might both be described as industrial but nonetheless serve profoundly different ends. To be sure, the size and complexity of modern societies have made nonpolitical features more influential on political action than they were in antiquity. Analysis of a modern regime does not exhaust the description of any modern society. One must still consult mainstream sociologists and the economists to understand such a society more fully, inasmuch as social and economic conditions obviously limit politicians’ conditions of action. But politics remains an independent and also in many ways the decisive element in understanding modern societies, when describing them both structurally and morally.

Aron did abandon one element of the classical approach, the search for the best regime. He retained another Aristotelian element, namely, the insistence that there can be a “best regime” *in* a given set of circumstances. This again raises the question of the derivation of right. If there is no best regime “abstractly” considered, how does the philosopher recognize the best one in the circumstances of his own time and place? What are the criteria of judgment? De Ligio doesn’t provide a clear answer to this question, although he

does observe that Aron maintained the existence of certain human virtues, recognizable across historical periods. The definition of corruption remarked by Gaspar evidently points to the absence or derangement of these virtues. If then there is such a thing as human nature for Aron, and if human virtues may be said to amount to instantiations of that nature “at its best”—perhaps when it isn’t self-destructive, self-contradictory?—then one might think Aron has a notion of natural right. This would bring him very close to Tocqueville, who defines rights as the obverse of virtues and both as bound up with the *natural* greatness of man. But this must remain a speculation on the basis of the evidence provided by De Ligio.

Be this as it may, De Ligio forthrightly maintains that “Aron derives from Plato a hermeneutical principle of political life: political regimes are what the men are who give them life” (131). If so (and again as in the *Republic*) “despotism can arise from license” (131), and a democracy without the virtue of moderation, a democracy that “push[es] too far the application of the principle” peculiar to it, namely egalitarianism, will ruin itself. This is true of all regimes. If Aron (unlike Plato) eschews the quest for the best regime simply or “in abstraction,” he does have some firm notion of the best practicable regime or order, probably within fairly generous parameters allowing for individual proclivities and tastes, of the human soul. And that soul then expresses itself in relation to self-expression of the soul or souls that comprise a given regime.

The redoubtable Daniel J. Mahoney of Assumption College in Massachusetts contributes the tenth of the book’s nineteen principal essays. He gives us a somewhat more Burkean Aron than De Ligio. In their “unabashed Machiavellianism,” Nazism and Italian Fascism “mocked the traditional categories of Western civilization,” repudiating “the ‘old virtues’ held dear by bourgeois civilization: ‘respect for the person, respect for the mind...personal autonomy,’” and replacing them with “‘virtues of action, of asceticism, of devotion’” (138). But this is no simple traditionalism, as seen in the title of Aron’s 1944 book, *Man against the Tyrants*—man as such. Mahoney regards Aron’s moral foundation as located on the crossroad of “biblical, liberal, and Kantian” principles (139). Although Aron never accepted the theology of the Bible, its “ideals and affirmations still spoke to his soul” (140), and these could indeed be reconciled with liberalism and the Kantian refusal to treat man as a means but only as an end.

Regarding the Stalinist tyranny that the West confronted after the defeat of the tyrants of the Right, Aron “was one of the first to acknowledge

the Leninist roots of Stalinist totalitarianism” (140). Stalinism wasn’t a deformation of Leninism (as Trotsky and his followers had claimed) but its culmination in practice: “After 1930, the Soviet regime was totalitarian not only in aspiration but in reality” (140), and even the Nazis would never catch up to the sheer numbers it murdered. As with the Germans, however, so with the Russians; the tyrannical regime did not destroy the fundamental human characteristics of the people, and although Aron “had his doubts about whether a post-Communist Russia would evolve in the direction of English or American democracy,” he did think that it could get out from under totalitarianism.

After studying both forms of totalitarianism or modern tyranny, Aron concluded that it featured an institutional marker, namely, the rule of one party, and a teleological one, the rule of ideology, that is, the rule of a comprehensive lie. *Pace* Karl Popper, a comprehensive lie isn’t the “noble lie” proposed by Plato’s Socrates. Socrates’s lies aim at teaching certain truths about human nature; the myth of the metals, for example, gives citizens the image of his (itself simplified) description of the three parts of the human soul. The modern tyrants’ lies serve to destroy the memory of the very notion of the human soul; instead of pointing toward nature they assault it.

Serge Audier, who teaches philosophy at the University of Paris–Sorbonne, offers a fascinating if not entirely persuasive attempt to find a Machiavellian side to Aron’s thought, although it must immediately be observed that he understands Machiavelli quite differently than De Ligio or Mahoney. Audier rejects Leo Strauss’s interpretation of Machiavelli as the founder of the modern project insofar as he calls upon men generally and the prince especially to master fortune by learning how not to be good; he also rejects the claim that Machiavelli forms part of a tradition of civil republicanism that began with Aristotle—the argument of J. G. A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner. While he concurs with Mahoney in saying that the young Aron held something much like Strauss’s view, he contends that Aron gradually changed his opinion before World War II and “proceed[ed] in a new direction” after the war (152).

In Audier’s account, Aron shifted his position after reading James Burnham’s *The Machiavellians: Defenders of Freedom*, published in 1943. He was so impressed that he had the volume translated and published in France. Burnham argues that Machiavelli and his followers opposed the tyranny of princes with a new form of republicanism, one that gave free play to political conflict so long as it stayed within legal and institutional bounds. A balanced government, a mixed regime or at least a democracy with many factions in

it, all contending for power—a constitution not unlike the one the American founders enacted in the 1780s—would, in Aron’s words, “preserve freedom by maintaining rivalry within the law” (153) or, as Audier puts it, “private ambitions must be channeled through public institutions” (154). For Burnham, and for Burnham’s Machiavelli, man is anything but the political animal described in Aristotle; he is selfish and contentious.

This gives Audier a different opinion of Aron’s refusal to seek the “ideal” regime or “city in speech” seen in pre-Machiavellian political philosophy. There can be no end to political conflict; the several parts of the city, its various social groups, can never be harmonized. “Like the Florentine, [Aron] does not condemn ambition as such or adopt a moralizing stance” because human ambition is normal, natural; “the whole problem is simply to ensure that such ambition proves useful to the State” (156). Audier goes so far as to say that Machiavelli intends that “channel[ing] human ambitions by law” can make those ambitions useful to the common good of the community” (157). It may be safer to say that Aron and the American founders thought that.

Audier provides us with Aron’s own formulation: “The merits [of the institutionalization of conflict] are immense—and it is here that Machiavellianism intervenes—if you do not seek a perfect regime. If one starts out from the idea that all plans are a reflection of human nature, and democracy is among the worst regimes classified, the democratic system is probably by far the best of bad regimes, that is to say the best of all possible regimes” (158). That is a witty restatement of the defense of democratic republicanism seen in the American founders and in their admirer, Tocqueville. The good regimes of Aristotle are no longer possible in the modern world. Aristotle himself seems to have judged that two of them (kingship and aristocracy) were quite improbable in his own world. But under modern, socially egalitarian conditions (the ones Tocqueville describes), Aristotle’s best practicable regime, the mixed regime, is no longer possible, either. This leaves what Aristotle judged to be the least bad regime, democracy, as the best realizable choice, especially if one finds it on a pluralistic society (Madison’s “interests”) and designs it so that ambitious men—following Pareto, call them “the elites”—check and balance one another under the rule of law.

Audier concludes by saying that Aron dealt with Machiavelli the way Machiavelli recommended that princes deal with everyone: Aron used Machiavelli, he did not seek carefully to follow him down the winding path on which Machiavelli leads his readers. “It is pointless to seek from him a true interpretation of the Florentine Secretary”—the ambition of Strauss

and Skinner (159). “It is also true that, due to the influence of Burnham and the elite theorists [Pareto, Mosca], Aron probably has a far too liberal and traditional view of Machiavelli, which does not adequately scrutinize the destabilizing force of the desire of the people for freedom in Machiavellian thought” (160). Rather, Aron follows in the tradition of writers who sought to tame, if not the prince—the princes of Aron’s day were the likes of Hitler, Stalin, and Mao, and taming them was not the solution—but the citizens whose ambitions revolve within the normal range. Audier cites Montesquieu, especially his account of Roman republicanism, and the earlier *Cato’s Letters* of Thomas Gordon and John Trenchard, as the Aronian forebears in the line. A judicious selection of Machiavellian techniques might indeed serve as a defense of freedom in modernity, without necessarily serving Machiavellian ends, just as American constitutionalism, framing the large, many-factioned population cited in *Federalist* 10, aims at securing natural rights not propounded by Machiavelli.

The essays by De Ligio, Mahoney, and Audier form the core of the central section of the collection, presenting several dimensions of Aron’s many-sided political thought. The final essays of the section, by French sociologist Serge Paugam and Iain Stewart, Lecturer in Modern European History at Queen Mary College, University of London, bring us back to the social and economic aspects of Aron’s argument.

Given the importance of social pluralism to Aron, Paugam’s interest in Aron’s sociological writings from the 1950s makes sense as the follow-on article after Audier. How exactly does Aron understand the social conflicts that he wants republics to channel? Thinking of Marxism and its derivatives, Aron wrote, “Western, especially European, societies are both obsessed with the notion of class and unable to define it” (164). No strictly materialist understanding of social classes will do because the “parts” of society don’t interact like the parts of a chair; they are conscious, not only of their economic or material conditions but of their own and others’ ideas and sentiments respecting philosophic and religious doctrines, political opinions, and other considerations that interact with economic interests without being determined by them. In comparing the then-dominant American and Soviet societies, Aron rightly suspected that Soviet workers no less than American workers regarded their bosses as less than favorable to their own welfare.

Three social issues concerned Aron at this time: the increasing heterogeneity of the working class; the transformation of social conflict; and the problem of sustained poverty in wealthy societies. Working-class heterogeneity went

against the Marxian prediction of an increasingly united and more sizeable working class facing off in sharp dialectical conflict with an ever-shrinking but also increasingly united bourgeoisie. “The worker,” as Paugam puts it, “does not belong solely to a world of workers” but also belongs to other communities, whether religious or political (166). Such multiple allegiances were resulting not in the proletarianization of the lower bourgeoisie but in the embourgeoisement of the workers—their acceptance of many opinions and sentiments Marxists (and the several “bohemian” movements that had sprung up since the early nineteenth century) scorned as “bourgeois,” such as work discipline, cleanliness, and indeed the godliness cleanliness was said to be next to. The fact of working-class heterogeneity would transform social conflict because workers with middle-class tendencies will follow the middle class into the political arena, intensifying their demands if only because they will have a greater variety of them, but using republican institutions rather than revolutionary violence as the preferred means of pressing those demands. They will become “Machiavellianized” in Burnham’s sense of the term. It would nonetheless be a mistake to assume that poverty will disappear. Although the economist John Kenneth Galbraith and other fashionable authors of the time expected the abolition of poverty, Aron agreed that the social complexity of the working class—with ethnic and racial differences complicating its attempts at economic advancement—would keep poverty alive in the West indefinitely. Paugam regards this last concern as the prelude to, although somewhat different from, the contemporary way in which “the class struggle of yesterday is now merging with a struggle for protection and recognition” (175).

Iain Stewart approaches the economic problem not with sociological analysis but via an account of the collaboration between academic and political socialists, beginning in the 1920s when Aron studied at university. In the 1920s, a group of French socialists established a study group at the *École normale supérieure*. Modeled on the British Fabian Society, the group linked itself with one of the Socialist Party’s leaders, Marcel Déat. These young Socialists broke with the Marxist-oriented mainstream of the Party, arguing for a policy of electoral appeals to middle-class as well as working-class voters instead of class struggle. They favored a program of gradual nationalization of major companies and economic planning. Upon his return to Germany in 1934, Aron renewed his university-days friendship with one of the most able Socialist academics in the group, Robert Marjolin; they joined in opposing the policies of the Socialist Party government led by Léon Blum, contending that economic redistribution and other reforms wouldn’t work unless the

French economy became more productive. Among socialist thinkers, esteem for production as a means of achieving social justice was most prominent in the writings of Saint-Simon, who valorized “industrial civilization” (184). Industrialism could supply the important burst of productive energy needed to sustain social reform.

Thus during the 1940s and 1950s Aron advocated what Anglo-Americans would recognize as Keynesian or *dirigiste* economics, sympathetic to (for example) US President Franklin Roosevelt’s famous call for a “New Bill of Rights” including “freedom from want” (181). Aron explicitly criticized the economic libertarianism of Friedrich von Hayek, whose magnum opus, *The Constitution of Liberty*, Aron criticized at some length when it appeared in 1961. At the same time, as noted also by Mahoney, Aron never succumbed to the easy optimism of 1950s Keynesians, always recognizing that *dirigisme* could at best amount to “a partial solution that posed its own new challenges to the liberal order” (187) including the potential for bureaucratic sclerosis. It is nonetheless probably fair to say that Aron underestimated the prescience of Tocqueville’s dystopic warning against “soft despotism,” which appears rather more plausible now, fifty years after Aron considered it.

In view of the question raised by previous contributors—to what extent does Aron endorse Machiavellianism?—Stewart finds a decidedly apposite passage: “I think [Aron wrote] that democratic regimes are those which have a minimum of respect for the human person [that is, as distinguished from tyrannies, which have no respect for that at all] and do not consider individuals uniquely as means of production or objects of propaganda” (181). Respect for the human person might be a Catholic or a Kantian formulation, but it does not figure conspicuously in the doctrines of the smiling Florentine.

Part III consists of six articles on Aron’s understanding of the modern philosophers whose intellectual company he kept most frequently: Kant, Weber, Marx, Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and Tocqueville. Pierre Hassner of the Johns Hopkins University’s European Center at Bologna contends that Aron “never gave up his commitment to Kant or the Enlightenment” (198), a commitment initiated at university in the 1920s. He did abandon Kant’s belief that the course of events would work itself out into a condition of perpetual peace in Europe—“a happy ending for history” (198). For Aron, rational behavior may or may not someday infuse international politics more thoroughly than it has done—and it might very well become more prevalent than it was in the first half of the twentieth century (a low bar, indeed)—but to any “Kantian conclusions” about the future Aron always appended “a protestation of ignorance

and a question mark following the profession of moral faith” (199). Unlike Kant, he invested few hopes in any “league of nations.”

The moral dimension of Kantianism finds a larger place in Aron’s thought than the historical dimension. “He says in his *Mémoires* that he never forgot the categorical imperative or the ‘Religion within the limits of Reason’” (201)—itself a rather weak endorsement, inasmuch as never forgetting isn’t quite the same as adherence. But unlike Kant, whose political philosophy “is not, strictly speaking, ultimately political” but legal, moral, and historical (200), “the center of [Aron’s] thinking is political” (201). Rationalism, yes: but a prudential rationalism for statesmen guided by a moral rationalism that appears based primarily on a more or less naturalistic conception of “the human person.”

As a sociologist by training, Aron found in Weber crucial elements of his own moral and political thinking, as Scott Nelson and coeditor José Colen show in their essay.

It was in Max Weber’s writings that Aron eventually found the resources and the words to express the relationship between politics and morality. Moreover, Aron also found in Weber an exposition of the tension between knowledge (science) and action (politics). There are genuine trade-offs between a profession that demands the absolute pursuit of truth and one that demands the willingness to compromise not only one’s own morals (anathema to the moralist) but even the truth itself (anathema to the scientist). (205)

The Weberian distinction between an ethic of conviction and an ethic of responsibility drew Aron’s particular attention. Unlike Machiavelli, Aron saw, Weber did not advise the politician to abandon moral conviction but rather to take responsibility for the consequences of actions that deviated from conviction. “Conviction” moralists—Aron thought Weber was thinking of two kinds, Christians and revolutionaries—inclined either towards pacifist incapability of meeting force with force or ill-judged attempts at treating a good goal “as an absolute value whose price of attainment could never be too high” (207). Aron saw himself as “stand[ing] up for reason and responsibility in the carnival of French political life” (207).

At the same time, Aron rightly worried that “false realists” might twist the ethic of responsibility into “disregard[ing] moral injunctions with impunity” even as “false idealists” might “wantonly blind themselves to the critical role they are playing in contributing to the collapse of the existing order, thereby paving the way for revolutionaries or tyrants to rule” (207). And even a sincere

and sober attempt to follow an ethic of responsibility “assume[s] that the actor in question has had the opportunity to consider (or refuse to consider) the potential consequences of his actions” (207)—clearly impossible on many occasions in politics. Weber’s own call for a “charismatic *Übermensch* who would rescue Germany from Christian servility, revolutionary stupidity, and bureaucratic sterility” had the worst sort of unintended consequences a few decades after he made it (208–9). What is more, insofar as Weber tempered his nationalism with liberalism it was a liberalism “not rooted in metaphysics or natural law” or even in utilitarianism but in “the pragmatism of power” (209). Having seen for himself the consequences of this severing of liberalism from any universal principle, which leaves it untethered against nationalist passion if that passion can claim that its very extremism “works” in practice, Aron demurred. Rather like Aristotle (and of course exactly like Kant), Aron insisted that some actions are morally wrong, whatever the circumstances.

For Aron, “the essence of politics...consists of the tensions between the exigencies of the moment, the political morality that seeks to accommodate the citizens’ private moralities”—which often contradict one another—“and the statesman’s own private moralities (some of which are reconcilable with each other, some of which are not), that exist both within and between human beings. The great statesman is he who can navigate his way through this stormy sea of uncertainty—knowing full well that many of his decisions will leave him little-to-no time for reflection and therefore be based entirely on political knack—and arrive at the action that is, given the circumstances, the least detestable both for himself and for the collectivity” (214).

Sylvie Mesure, a sociologist who serves as Director of Research at the Centre nationale de la recherche scientifique in Paris, addresses Aron’s interpretation of Marx. She concurs with previous contributors in observing that Aron rejected Marxian historical determinism, insisting always on what one of his avid readers, Henry Kissinger, would call the necessity for choice. Marx’s claim for the foundational character of economics in historical causation and his millenarian faith in a communist future for mankind were equally suspect in Aron’s view.

In the early 1960s Aron revisited Marx in response to the ongoing controversy between Sartre and Louis Althusser. Sartre and his followers maintained that “the young Marx” had been a humanist and social activist, but the mature Marx’s turn to economics was fully in line with his original humanist leanings. Althusser claimed that an “epistemological break” had occurred, as Marx turned from “ideology” toward hard, empirical economic

science. Aron sided with Sartre in defending Marx's intellectual consistency but disagreed that he had ever been a humanist in the sense of a humanitarian. Young and old, Marx adhered to a nonidealist, materialist form of Hegelianism, in which the dialectic of economic class struggle rather than the dialectical unfolding of an "Absolute Spirit" drove history forward to its end. It is true, Aron conceded, that the young Marx was more nearly Hegelian than the Marx of *Capital*, but this was "a matter of degree not of kind."

Mesure concludes by citing Aron's opinion that Marx was mistaken in his proudest claim: to have discovered "a scientific basis for his theory of the collapse of capitalism" and thus "to theoretically explain the movement of history" (225). He did share with Marx a refusal of complacency in the face of social injustice, remaining a reformist if not a revolutionary throughout his career. Aron also shared with Marx an interest in understanding the thoughts of philosophers and statesmen in their "socio-political context" even as he insisted that understanding an author's intention is the preliminary step to doing this. That is, Aron exhibited a "Marxian" interest in historical context without reducing thought to an epiphenomenon of its context.

New University of Lisbon philosophy professor Diogo Pires Aurélio brings us back to Machiavelli. Illustrating exactly Measure's observation about Aron's dual interest in a philosopher's intention and his influence in a given social circumstance, Aurélio points to Aron's distinction between Machiavelli's teaching and "Machiavellianism"—that is, the way in which Machiavelli's teaching was used in the twentieth century. Modern tyranny was one form of such Machiavellianism; Machiavelli, describer and encourager of tyrannical princes, found eager students in Aron's time. Aron recognized and endorsed several of Machiavelli's teachings: "human passions do not change throughout history, and thus men and groups come into conflict with each other" (233); within certain limits, nature changes but not always for the better, everything on earth will decline after its time of flourishing, even and especially human associations; there being no sustained progress in nature, but also no permanent decline, political orders run in cycles. The nature of human beings, "nasty and ambitious" (234), makes moral rules ineffective in restraining them; the ruler needs to employ threats of violence and at times violence itself, to be feared more than loved. Modern Machiavellians such as Pareto add to this a distinction between masses and *leaders*; the latter use force and fraud to dominate the former. With Strauss, Aron saw that *The Prince* and the *Discourses* "share the same perspective on politics" (235). It is a perspective that rejects cunning and violence not for moral reasons but only

when they fail to secure the rule of the prince or (in republics) the elites; this is what Machiavelli means by saying he seeks the *effectual* truth.

Machiavelli wants the ruler or rulers to construct (as Aron phrases it) “a strong, flourishing, ordered, and legal state” (235). Unlike the feudal orders of his own time, this state will be centralized; unlike the petty principalities of his Italy, it will be substantial in size and population. It will not, however, be an impersonal administrative state, such as Europeans built later on; Machiavelli’s state belongs to persons, whether the one or the few. But Machiavelli’s refusal to accept any “transcendent purpose” for political action, which results in a political science that attends merely to the acquisition and maintenance of power, might be said to prepare for such an impersonal state by making human beings (and especially rulers) unprecedentedly impersonal, inviting them to become throbbing nerves of ambition, guided by calculating, vulpine brains.

In his contribution to the volume, Serge Audier emphasized the difference between the Machiavelli Aron described in the 1930s and 1940s and the republican Machiavelli he commended, with serious reservations, later on. Aurélio elaborates on this, writing that “the problem with modern Machiavellianism is that it reads *The Prince* as if it constituted Machiavelli’s entire oeuvre” (236). With Pareto, it also inclines toward progressivism and the leadership principle. Aron’s “moderate Machiavellianism” (239) does indeed extract teachings useful to republican regimes founded in modern states, but Aurélio’s Aron thinks that “the Florentine’s methodology, in spite of his love for liberty, leads to Machiavellianism and gives a rational basis for those who would apply the techniques of tyranny in the twentieth century” (240). Putting it somewhat differently, having seen the defects of Machiavellian republicanism in Germany, Aron became alert to the way it might issue in the tyrannical Machiavellianism of the Nazis. Against the latter Machiavellianism, Aron characteristically argued for the use of the “Machiavellian” technique of force against force instead of an ineffectual “Christian” pacifism. And while Pareto’s Machiavellian remark that all regimes, whether princely or republican, really amount to the rule of elites, Aurélio quotes Aron: “What is really interesting to see is the constitution of the dominant oligarchy and the relationship between this dominant oligarchy and the great number, or, more precisely still, the capacity of action of this dominant oligarchy concerning the mass of citizens, and on the other hand the guarantees given to its citizens concerning government” (241). For Aron (as for Aristotle, one might add), politics means ruling *and* being ruled, *with* “transcendent” ends in mind.

All these valuable articles notwithstanding, it remains clear that the two modern political philosophers closest to Aron are Montesquieu and Tocqueville. Fortunately, the editors have found two scholars equal to the responsibility of doing justice to these relationships: Miguel Morgado, a political scientist at Portuguese Catholic University, and Aurelian Criautu, a political scientist at Indiana University.

Morgado remarks that Montesquieu and Aron have both attracted the same criticism, a criticism that raises once more a central theme of this collection: Do these thinkers offer “a coherent structure of natural right for the basis of [their] political philosophy” (246)? Or do they silently abandon natural right for elaborate sociological and institutional descriptions and analyses? Morgado shows that while both men understand modern societies as being larger and more complex than ancient *poleis*, they continue to regard the political regime as the primary if not the simply dominant causative factor in modern states and the societies that undergird them. That is to say, they are “political sociologists” (247). They identify three elements of the regime: its “nature” or institutional form; its “principle” or moving passions; and its purpose or predominant idea—for example, political liberty in England (248–49).

The reason critics find Montesquieu and Aron confusing is their recognition that regimes also have specific tasks to fulfill, here and now. They must survive and seek their purpose in geographic, international, and social conditions that may vary over time, organize and reorganize themselves accordingly. A republic in France might be very different from a republic in Iraq; for a variety of reasons, a republic in Iraq might prove even harder to secure than a republic in France was, and that is saying a lot. Thus the judgment of regimes in terms of the universal character of natural right might vary considerably depending on the customs and other circumstances of the people it rules. This, it might be added, reminds one of the classical claim that natural right is flexible, not a thing simply to be arrived at by deductive reasoning. It isn’t quite right to say, with Morgado and his Aron, that the political sociology of Montesquieu and Aron “turns Greek absolutism on its head” (251); it is more likely that they are responding to what natural right must look like under the conditions of the modern state—large, centralized, socially pluralistic. Both men share Aristotle’s understanding that, as Aron puts it, “men are only human if they obey and rule humanely” (252)—that is to say, above all, with the virtue of moderation. Politically considered, moderation often entails compromise—“a synonym for moderation” (253). But compromise does not exhaust political life. Compromise might paralyze

political life, preventing the state from “pursuing a coherent and stable political strategy” (255)—as de Gaulle argued against the parliamentarism of the Third and Fourth Republics in France.

Morgado ends his comparison of Montesquieu and Aron with a sober reminder of their sense of the limitations of all political regimes, their antiutopianism. Montesquieu famously commended the regime of commercial republicanism against the military republic seen most spectacularly in Rome. For his part, as we’ve seen, Aron wanted a commercial-industrial society combined with republican political institutions. “For Aron, modern democracies are condemned to be an object of disappointment. They disappoint both citizens and scientists because democracies are ‘pedestrian’” (257). Moderate democracy is prosaic, unpoetic. Given the modern-tyrannical alternative, so much the better for their citizens, and for the world.

Aurelian Craiutu observes that Aron had studied Marx and the other principal German political philosophers before seriously engaging Tocqueville. In some respects he had already thought his way towards Tocqueville by thinking about the Germans critically. In contrasting Tocqueville with Marx in a way that favored the former he put Tocqueville back on the French intellectual map while performing a service that the two philosophers themselves never did; although contemporaries, they “ignored each other” (264). Aron was struck by the way Tocqueville, no very close student of political economy and an opponent of historical determinism, nonetheless predicted the future more accurately than Marx. The workers of the world would not unite.

Tocqueville and Aron share a “common concern for safeguarding liberty and reconciling it with the demands for equality in modern democratic societies” (267). To be sure, Aron saw and emphasized the importance of industrialism more than Tocqueville did, but he shared Tocqueville’s insistence (against the socialist Marx but also against the libertarian Hayek) that both “negative” liberty or freedom from constraint and “positive” liberty or freedom to participate in government must be combined in order for citizens of modern societies to sustain the degree of genuinely political life that is possible in modern states. Unlike the economics-centered defenders of socialism or of capitalism, Tocqueville and Aron insisted on the integrity of the political sphere.

Both also agreed on the unfortunate role intellectuals tended to play in politics, especially in France, whether in the revolutionary turmoil of 1848 (narrated with some irony by Tocqueville in his *Souvenirs*) or that of 1968 (as

seen in Aron's *La révolution introuvable*). Both men raised an eyebrow at the spectacle of intellectuals who inclined to indulge in political passions instead of exercising their, well, intellects. "Aron reiterated Tocqueville's point...that intellectuals tend to search in politics for what is ingenuous [*sic*: ingenious?] and new instead of what is true, and are inclined to appreciate good acting, grandiose gesturing, and fine speaking for their own sake and (often) without reference to the facts themselves" (270). Aron added, "To tell the truth, the whole nation shares it a little, and the French public as a whole often takes a literary man's view of politics" (270). Against this impassioned politics valorizing the eloquent enunciation of what Tocqueville calls a general idea, both men favored strengthening civil associations and administrative decentralization, which afford citizens practical experience in self-government, redirecting their minds and hearts toward realities on the ground as perceived and judged by common sense. Moderation and "trust in human freedom" joined with "respect for human dignity" remained the prosaic, nonrevolutionary, and best pathways for citizens whose societies marshaled unprecedented technological power.

Centre Aron research associate Christian Bachelier's epilogue complements Nicolas Baverez's introductory account of Aron's life and works. Bachelier assigns particular importance to the place of Élie Halévy in Aron's intellectual journey—the critique of pacifism, the esteem for republicanism against then-fashionable claims that "the center cannot hold" against tyrannies Left and Right, the way that those tyrannies end up mimicking one another as the hypernationalist fascism appropriated socialist economics and the hypersocialist communists invoked loyalty to the Glorious Motherland as soon as military threats to their regime arose. Halévy died suddenly in 1937, but Aron remained faithful to the core of his mentor's insights on "totalitarian" tyranny.

Aron himself attracted many students. Manent recalls that he never sought disciples. His humane pluralism extended to his personal conduct. This *Companion* continues in the Aronian spirit, giving us a variety of "takes" on Aron urged by scholars drawn from several countries and academic disciplines. In politics and in academia today we are seeing less of this spirit. The writers here resist the trend with Aronian resolution, moderation, and intelligence. Their well-informed disagreements may bring readers to a closer study of Aron—to join him, and them, as companions.



## Featured Review

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Pierre Manent, *Seeing Things Politically: Interviews with Bénédicte Delorme-Montini*. Translated by Ralph C. Hancock. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's, 2015, xx + 215 pp., \$30.00 (hardcover).

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At the end of his essay “Progress or Return?” Leo Strauss writes, “No one can be both a philosopher and a theologian, nor, 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.”<sup>1</sup> In this series of interviews, Pierre Manent comes before us as a thinker who does attempt to hold these rival ways of life in balance within himself, yet without attempting the “synthesis” Strauss criticizes.

As Daniel J. Mahoney observes in his excellent introduction, Manent describes his life’s intention as the desire to understand “what *is*” (1). To this Socratic ambition he adds the distinctive Socratic turn: “the political order is what truly gives human life its form” (2). But, contra current fashion, not everything is political. The political is the starting point for philosophizing, not its animating principle. To conceive of politics as merely the quest for and exercise of “power,” and then to conceive of Being itself as will to power,

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Strauss, “Progress or Return?” in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 270.

turned twentieth-century politics toward unprecedented forms of tyranny. At least one of the century's greatest philosophers, Heidegger, went along for that disastrous ride. Manent recalls how France emerged from an earlier exercise of political terror (generated by the Jacobin "murder machine," as Chateaubriand called it) "with the capacity for a marvelous literature, a splendid poetry, and for the analysis of modern society and of modern politics characterized by a precision, an elegance and the scope that we have admired since the rediscovery of Benjamin Constant, Guizot, and Tocqueville" (7). As the politically monarchic, socially aristocratic ancien régime declined, this "liberal political science of democratic society" gave the French both political and intellectual breathing space. Politically, it showed how democratic societies might defend natural rights, including the rights to liberty, under the conditions of modern social egalitarianism and statism. Intellectually, these new societies worked toward a possible settlement of the theological-political controversies that had racked Europe throughout the early centuries of modernity. Such a recovery from the worse-than-Jacobin tyrannies of the past century can occur, Manent hopes, if the politics of the ancients, rooted in the compact, highly "politicized" society seen in the polis, and the politics of the moderns, rooted in the expansive society seen in the state, can both be understood, can be brought together, "in a *histoire raisonné* based upon this single hypothesis: man is a political animal. To lay out our whole *history* starting from our political *nature*—that is what I would like to show and to make comprehensible" (9). Such a nonhistoricist history would overcome the implausible, not-really-rational, unrealistic historical narratives that have prevailed in the past two centuries.

If Socratic philosophy is a way of life, then it makes sense to give an account of the life of the one who philosophizes. Manent's interviewer thus begins by eliciting an account of Manent's life as a thinker. Karl Marx was the tutelary deity of the Manent household when Manent began to think of political things during the American occupation of France at the end of the Second World War. "One hardly met anyone of the right" in his "homogeneous milieu" (16). This changed at the *lycée*, that well-established republican institution in which French youth came together not as Communists or Catholics, democrats or monarchists, but as citizens—young citizens who, moreover, shared the arduous experience of really learning French, Latin, Greek, and mathematics, "the four dragons that had to be conquered" (17). In particular, "the French language was the bond that held together all the subjects"; even the math teacher's classes "were always French classes," exercises in the precise use of words, not only of numbers (18).

It was at the *lycée* that Manent encountered the dialectical contradiction to his father's Marxism in the person of Louis Jugnet, a Thomist in the line of Jacques Maritain and Étienne Gilson. "The first thing he taught me is that there is much to be *known* on the subject of religion" (20). "My approach to religion was through speculative theology, and not through piety" (21). Manent counts himself fortunate for having encountered, early in life, teachers who recognized his intellectual needs and proclivities and put them ahead of indoctrination. Crucially, it was the Catholic Jugnet who guided Manent to the Jewish Raymond Aron, and thereby to a conception of the political, understood as a realm of thought related to but independent of philosophy and religion. Manent found the Sorbonne itself to be a place where a politics of the radical Left existed side-by-side with philosophic studies of Descartes, Kant, and Hegel, among others; only in Aron's classes could he "find a way to unite my intellectual and my political interests" (25), which by now included (thanks to Jugnet) a serious interest in religion dismissed by his classmates. "The more the academic philosophy became mechanical, technical, and systematic, the more political passions fermented, became focused, and heated up beneath the surface. They exploded in 1968" (26). The explosion never singed Manent, who found himself "indifferent" to the intellectual and political fashions of the period (29). To put it in American terms, he was the kid who heard the Rolling Stones but found that he preferred Sinatra.

Given his theological interests, "I was looking for a reference point beyond politics," but Aron, "the perfect gentleman," "experienced no need of transcendence" (39). Perceiving the needs of the young person before him, Aron pointed Manent to Strauss—specifically, to *Natural Right and History*. The rediscovery of classical natural right seen there convinced Manent of the freedom of the human mind—its essential freedom from its own social setting. Strauss's recovery in modernity of "the ancients" showed Manent that human beings are not "socially determined" beings, slaves to the thoughts and passions of their own time and place. Strauss also showed Manent that the Thomist tradition that he'd encountered with Jugnet inclined to depreciate politics; its treatment of Aristotle confined itself to the *Nicomachean Ethics* and Book I of the *Politics*. Such an approach scants Aristotle's distinctive contribution to the study of politics, his classification of political societies in terms of their regimes. Reading Strauss enabled Manent to connect his moral concerns with his intention to understand politics—to connect Jugnet and Aron.

Manent nonetheless did not follow Strauss all the way, did not become a “Straussian.” “I have never really succeeded in making sense” of Strauss’s portrait of “the philosopher” (49), which Manent takes to mean a human being whose intellectual ascent raises him above human society itself, one whose noetic perception of the Good replaces the interest in the human things—to politics understood as the quest for justice. To Strauss’s Platonic Socrates, political life is the philosopher’s gateway to this otherworldly way of life, a gateway to be left behind. Manent wants to linger at the gateway. But unlike the moderns, Manent doesn’t deny the existence of the transcendent, the existence of the Good. He affirms that “there are...‘higher things’ than man” (50). However, he finds “more humanity” in “the religious person.” Although Manent does not explain why this is so, it may be because the religious person (or perhaps the religious person centered in biblical revelation rather than, say, Buddhist meditation) understands human persons in light of the divine Person—that is, in terms of a love of God that equally commands love of neighbor. But Manent himself leaves this uncertain.

In his conversations with Strauss’s most famous student (and ardent Francophile) Allan Bloom, Manent confirmed his sense that the philosopher as Strauss conceives him finally does not love family or country so much as nature. Still, Bloom showed that the philosopher loves human nature, seeking philosophic friends—chatting with Manent’s young daughters, for example, to find out if they were souls “capable of philosophy” (56), capable of someday joining Bloom in the philosophic quest. At least physically, Socrates *did* linger at the gateway; Socratic self-knowledge in this sociable understanding of the philosophic way of life, the philosophic regime, amounts not to knowledge of the self as an “incommunicable or incomparable particularity” but as “discerning how human motives, the motives *common* to all human beings, are configured in one’s own soul” and then putting that soul in such order as to “hold oneself in the world” in such a way as to discard the false signals every society sends to those who live within it and to fulfill human nature, the nature that (in Aristotle’s phrase) “wants to know”—to know what *is* (58–59).

And so, Manent tells his interlocutor, “I am in a triangle: politics, philosophy, religion. I have never been able to settle one of those poles”—Aron, Strauss, or Jugnet (and behind him Maritain and Aquinas). “There are thus three human attitudes, each of which claims a complete devotion that I cannot or will not grant to any of them because the two others also appeal to me” (59–60). In this he finds himself to be quite French: “one thing that distinguishes France is that there are among us quite a number of individuals who

have produced considerable work that cannot be classified according to the standard academic categories” (68).

In the book’s central section, Manent outlines the substance of his *histoire raisonnée*. In doing so, he clarifies a distinction many political scientists (even those schooled by the writings of Plato and Aristotle) often miss: the distinction between two ways of classifying political communities, namely, regimes and what Manent calls political orders. The classic texts elaborate the first classification. The second was known to “the ancients” but not formally analyzed by the Greeks; it is a classification based upon the size of a political community combined with its degree of governmental centralization. In antiquity, the polis was small but centralized. Benjamin Constant’s well-known definition of “the liberty of the ancients,” which consisted of direct citizen participation in governing activities, derives from the obvious fact that in a small place there’s no easy way to escape political authority. To be free in a small community is to share in its governance. Ancient empires, by contrast, were huge but decentralized, often consisting of a sort of protection racket: I have conquered you but I will let you live if you guarantee to pay tribute to me and remain a loyal ally; otherwise, you may govern yourselves with your own customs and laws so long as they interfere in no way with my interests. A polis or an empire might *have* any of the several regimes, but is not itself defined solely by its regime.

Manent focuses on two major transformations of these political orders. The first kind consisted of the transition from polis to empire, effected in Greece by Alexander and then in Rome by ambitious citizens of Rome itself. Both left the theological underpinnings of existing regimes more or less as they had been. The second transformation consisted of the Machiavellian reconstitution of the feudal order (which Manent regards as mostly inchoate, as much a disorder as an order) into the modern state, a new political order much bigger than a polis but much more centralized than any ancient empire. Under the guiding spirit of Machiavelli, “Europeans decided to do something new, something absolutely unprecedented, which appeared as the modern, which they called modern and by which they distinguished themselves or separated themselves from everything previous”—“an enterprise that progressively rose in power before winning over all of Europe and finally the whole world” (86). This transformation did challenge the theological underpinnings of existing regimes and of the existing political demi-order. Hegel and his epigones have told this story before, but in writing history as a reflection of human nature, indeed of man as a political animal, Manent

rejects the historicists' claim that human nature is rather an instantiation of "History"—whether that be understood as the self-unfolding of the Absolute Spirit or the materialist dialectics of class or of race. For Manent as for Strauss, man is emphatically not a historical being at his core; a genuine history of human beings must take account of that.

Under conditions of modern statism, human beings have vindicated their political nature by demanding their rights—rights tied "to the individual human being." By nature, man is a rights-bearing animal and the modern state should be designed to secure those rights. That is, "the very notion of right presupposes society and relation because the very definition of right is to organize society and the relations among its members" in a certain way. Rights as "we moderns" conceive them inhere in each of us but we need political society, including the formidable and potentially overbearing modern state, for their security. "That is a problem, isn't it?" (90–91).

This leads Manent to Tocqueville, who addressed this problem in the most cogent way seen in Europe. Unlike Aron (and, it should be added, unlike almost all American scholars), Manent sees that *Democracy in America* is first and foremost what its title says it is: a book about democracy—defined as a pervasive social egalitarianism or absence of aristocracy—as it existed in America when Tocqueville saw it, and not primarily a book about America. America matters to Tocqueville because it is as democratic in its social structure as Europe and the rest of the world is fast becoming. It is what our contemporaries in academia call a case study. But it's democracy that he wants to understand, and how Americans have governed themselves under democratic conditions.

In focusing on Tocqueville's interest in democracy Manent initially mistakes Tocqueville for a historicist, saying that he resembles Marx and Nietzsche in their historical determinism even as he differs from them in his description of what the laws of history are and what they will produce at "the end of history" (98). But under the salutary prodding of his interlocutor, Bénédicte Delorme-Montini, he soon recalls that even under the leveling conditions of democracy "the aristocratic parts of the soul"—by which he means the spirited part, the part that demands its rights, fights for them, sometimes to the point of regretting that we have only one life to give to our country—will not suffer "complete disappearance" (103). And of course Tocqueville himself explicitly denies that he regards the dystopian vision of a human herd ruled by mild despots as something inevitable, averring that he has written his book precisely in order to resist such an outcome.

Manent actually continues Tocqueville's task, very much against historical determinists: "the problem I face is...to hold together Tocqueville's analysis of democracy's power to carry us toward ever greater equality, and the recognition of the eternal play between the few and the many" (105).

The ancient political orders, polis and empire, developed as it were naturally or spontaneously, "in the absence of any prior idea or conception," such as Machiavelli's asserted uncovering of "the effectual truth" of human life against the Platonic ideas and Aristotelian teleology. The ancient political orders predated philosophy; the modern state came out of a set of philosophic claims. (Insofar as rulers of the modern state have failed to understand religion, insofar as they allow themselves to be animated by what Strauss calls antitheological ire, they reflect philosophic doctrines that mismanage their relation to religion.) As the modern philosophic project was elaborated, the language of modern science attempted to capture "the effectual truth" with language unmoored from "the ordinary language of political life" (110)—again a point first given careful attention by Strauss. Manent says that as a result of this increasingly abstract, *modern*-scientific (and therefore) *un*-commonsensical account of politics, "most of the knowledge that society has had of itself [in modernity] has come through literature. It suffices to mention Balzac" (111). But with the continued augmentation of the modern state and the pervasiveness of its technocratic language within common speech, "confidence in the power of meaningful speech, in literary speech, has largely dissipated, and such speech has almost entirely ceased to be a political institution, at least in France, at least since the beginning of the 1960s" (111). Politics, the life of citizens ruling one another, declines in the face of administrative rule, a form of rule that lacks the reciprocity, the character of ruling and of being ruled, seen in political life rightly understood.

To understand the transition from one political order to another, Manent returns to two periods when this happened, namely, the transition of Rome from a polis to an empire and then to the transition of Europe from the feudal demi-order to the modern state. He regards Cicero as the much-neglected thinker who attempted to understand Rome's transformation and to guide it. "Cicero was truly the first to confront the political problem of the West, that of the viability of the city, that of the 'exit' from the city, and that of the passage from the city to another political form" (112). Having learned regime theory from the Greeks, knowing from it that Rome's republican regime suited it so long as it remained a polis but came under increasing strain as the city acquired an empire, Cicero tried to preserve political (and thus human) life in

this new circumstance, one that “was no longer essentially civic” (112). First, he “defined the magistrate as one who ‘bore the public person,’” although “the notion of a public person was unknown in the Greek city”; second, “he defined the function of the political order as that of protecting property”; and finally he “insist[ed] on the individual form of each person, on his particularity, distinguishing between the common nature of humanity and the nature proper to a person and inviting each person to follow, not only nature in general (as prescribed by classical Greek philosophy), but especially *his* nature” (113). The first of these steps relocates political life primarily in the ruling offices; the second and third steps tend toward protecting citizens who are no longer fully citizens under conditions of political gigantism.

Manent regards Cicero’s attempt as indispensable but insufficient because it could not preserve “what Machiavelli will call the *vivere civile* or the *vivere politico*” (114). Cicero “gathered most intelligently and wisely all the usable elements of the pagan political tradition and transformed them, but still without being able to give them an operational form” (114). For centuries to come, this was the best philosophers and theologians could do. The political order—whether the Roman empire or the later, smaller entities resulting from its dissolution—became increasingly indeterminate, as did the regimes associated with those successive orders. We’ve given this post-Roman demi-order the name “feudalism.” In effect, Manent shows the need for the establishment of Machiavelli’s state but finds that need not in the bifurcation of loyalties resulting from dual allegiance to the City of God and the City of Man but rather in the imperial project of Rome, which began before Christianity appeared. This account of political history follows from Manent’s underlying claim: “The cause of history is humanity’s political nature” (116). The centuries-long “Ciceronian moment”—from Julius Caesar to Machiavelli, from “Rome” to “Florence”—amounted to an arduous quest to satisfy “the need or desire of human beings to be governed and, preferably, to be well-governed or not too badly governed” (116). The moderns “sought and found order”; only once that had been found, in the modern state, could the regime question then be seriously addressed (118). For more or less opposite theological reasons, Machiavelli in philosophy and the Reformation in theology both sought in the modern state a protective shield against feudal civil disorder and its weakness in war. Both of these antifeudal stances require nations to go with states—Machiavelli, with his famous call for the rise of Italy, the Lutherans with their pan-Germanism, both against the church which aspired to catholicism, universalism.

Under the aegis of the state, social activity accelerated. Weber was mistaken: it wasn't Protestantism and its "ethic" that spawned capitalism but statism that protected Protestantism and fostered capitalism, the goose that laid golden eggs for the state, provided that the state protected the acquisitive and individualistic social activity that the Catholic Church had bridled. "As you see," Manent tells his interviewer, "I am careful to proceed in such a way that historical causality is always tied to non-historical causality, that is to say, to something that simply belongs to the human condition. This is neither the condition of the Greeks, nor that of the Romans, nor that of the Christians, nor that of the moderns, but simply the human condition" (124). European republicanism moved from a nostalgia for Cato the Younger, whose suicide marked the death of the republicanism of the polis, to the friendship of Montaigne and La Boétie, an embryonic civil-social association that affirms "virile human nature"—a republicanism consistent with individualism, a "regime of self-affirmation for human beings" (127). "It is impossible not to encounter the limits of political judgment when one political form transforms into another, when a regime that was good but corrupt gives place to one that is not as good but in a way necessary, and when the very principles of human order have become uncertain"; "the radical character of the modern enterprise was, in part, the price that finally had to be paid to leave behind [the] alienating legacy" of Rome—alienating because it required one to choose between Cato's republican suicide and the self-deification of Caesarism (129).

That enterprise now may have reached its limits, in which case we are in for another "Ciceronian moment." In Europe and, increasingly, around the world, the characteristic modern identity, citizenship in a nation, has weakened: one might now conceive of oneself as "at once Breton, French, European, and a citizen of the world" (146). "American protection and dominance" have made this possible, up until now, but not good or sustainable. Europeans prefer not to admit that "globalization" needs to rest on some foundation, which turns out to be Westernization, which turns out to be unpalatable to, for example, Chinese and Muslim people. Because "humanity does not constitute a political body"—being "incapable of self-government"—and because "the religion of humanity" or secular humanism which accompanies globalization doesn't command the elementary characteristic of any religion (the ability to bind souls to one another by a set of enforceable laws), "the European area will soon be the space of powerful recompositions of common life, and we do not know what form these recompositions will take" (147). "We are talking about something deeper than a revolution, because a revolution involves only a change of regime" (147); Manent hopes for a political form

that draws from “the old nations and the old religion” (148), but he does not try to “play Cicero”—to suggest what that form might be. Such fashionable proposals as democratization and globalization he judges too nearly empty of content to be of much real use, although they have preoccupied academic discussants: “I do not know whether what Marx called ‘the world’s becoming philosophical’ has been good for the world, but there is no doubt that it has not been good for philosophy” (154). The “postmodern” philosophies or ideologies that have superseded Marxism offer only “identity politics” without a firm identity; they will lose steam as we succumb to a “bad mixture of sentimental humanitarianism and unchained competition” (159).

In order to begin to draw upon the old nations and the old religion, Manent seeks to define the old religion by distinguishing it from the new one, the religion of humanity. That is, he returns to what Strauss calls the theological-political question. He remarks the difference between compassion and charity. Compassion consists of identifying oneself “with the suffering other” and (perhaps discreetly) sighing in relief that one is not the sufferer (160). Compassion amounts to the sentimental side of egalitarianism or the belief that we are all the same. “Charity is altogether different,” “a virtue that man cannot acquire or produce by his own strength” (161). “Charity is the love of God, the love by which God loves mankind and, first of all, the love by which God loves himself in the Trinitarian communion”; “something is charitable if it partakes, by God’s grace, in God’s love” (161). It is inegalitarian, an expression of condescension in the old, laudatory sense of the term, a sense that has disappeared precisely as egalitarianism has advanced; Jane Austen could still say “condescending” in a laudatory tone, but for us it is an affront. “Charity has nothing to do with the return to the self that belongs to the very life of the feeling of sameness because charity involves neither identification with the suffering other nor the satisfied and pleasant feeling of not suffering oneself” (161). Christians love God and love their neighbor “as the image of God,” inasmuch as “only God is truly loveable” (161). Humanitarianism (to say nothing of romanticism) does not apply. Mother Teresa wants not only to save your body but also and preeminently to become the human agent of the divine love that will save your soul, if you will let it.

For this reason Manent doubts that Tocqueville is correct to ascribe the beginning of modern democracy or egalitarianism to Christianity. “I have never yet found anything in the Gospels that resembles democratic equality or the principles of the philosophy of human rights” (164). “The very meaning of Christian equality resides in God and relates to the other world, and the

very meaning of democratic equality relates to this world!” he exclaims. To “secularize” Christianity is to de-Christianize it, inasmuch as the very notion of a Christ, a Savior, implies a radically superior Being. (To be fair to Tocqueville, this may be what he meant to convey in describing Christianity as a precious legacy of the aristocracy; after all, a divine revelation that includes the idea of the equality of all men under God is both “aristocratic”—or perhaps monarchic—in origin, even as it posits equality among human beings.) In any event, Manent observes that the centuries in which Christianity provided Europeans with their spiritual orientation “accommodated themselves very well to immense differences of rank and of fortune,” reinforced as they were by the Pauline injunction to obey the powers that be. It was the Enlightenment that pushed Europeans to democratize their societies.

And yet, as before, Manent relents, noticing that Christianity did prepare European souls for the seeds of egalitarianism in two ways. Although it did not at first “demand the abolition of slavery,” Christianity did undermine “the spirit of pagan warfare,” specifically the practice of “massacring the men and...reducing the women and children to slavery” (165). Christianity diminished the supply of slaves and thus served egalitarianism. More significantly, Christianity equalizes “access to truth” by teaching a truth that is “absolutely the same for the shepherd and the theologian” (167).

Christianity also induced Europeans to understand liberty in a new way by giving it a new (so to speak) ontological dimension, namely, free will. “One might even say that the notion of free will is, at bottom a Christian notion”—the “series of free responses that each individual addresses to the divine initiative” (168). Conscience, “an internal capacity of judgment” (168), differs from (for example) Antigone’s love of family and provides a strong moral foundation for resistance to the encroachments of political authority upon the integrity of the person. But conscience as conceived by Christians isn’t a natural or human *right*, as the moderns say. Conscience is the self-alignment of the human soul toward God’s will. But a *right* derives “from man’s simple humanity and not from his final purpose in God” (170). For the early moderns, a right was natural, not fundamentally covenantal. It was Calvinism, not Roman Catholicism or Lutheranism, that associated conscience “with modern freedom and with confidence in one’s own strength” (171). It was Calvinism that combined freedom of conscience and modern freedom with respect for the rule of law. In so describing the theological-political strengths of the West, Manent also shows how he began his journey in a Marxist family and, after encountering Catholicism in Jugnet, political prudence in Aron,

and political philosophy in Strauss and Bloom, he has come in the end to an appreciation of the Huguenots.

Nor does his political incorrectness end there. Manent does not hesitate to ascribe “a certain superiority” to the West over other civilizations. “Our civilization’s exploration of human possibilities is more complete than in other civilizations,” although this strength “obviously does not exempt us from the vices, defects, and weaknesses associated with the human condition” and also “exposes us to certain *risks* to which other civilizations are not exposed or are less exposed” (172). The aspiration to break with customs, with the law of ancestors, makes the West at once more likely to discover *nature* and at the same time assume the risky responsibility of mastering it. And if “the Greeks are the first to expose their nakedness and...take pride in it, in this capacity to show one’s nakedness” or nature, the Israelites upheld another kind of universalism, the universalism of a people who acted under the command to be a light for the nations (174–75). Taken together, Athens and Jerusalem both exhibit the capacity to acknowledge the universal without erasing or attempting to erase the particular, the political, the city. If man’s nature is political, and if God’s laws themselves imply a political regime, then human beings are not doomed to lives of tribal warfare on one hand or of a weak and unsustainable humanitarianism on the other.

“I believe this confidence in the strength of the soul is the great power of the West, the pagan West as well as the Christian West. Of course, the soul’s philosophic adventure and the religious adventure are quite distinct, but the human source is the same” (184). “In this sense, Christian-democratic America sums up and recapitulates these transformations of the soul that gave the soul this confidence in its own strength” (186). But the European Union, by contrast, “is not political; it does not mediate [between universal and particular]; it *blends* in its own eyes with humanity as it moves toward unification” (187). Except that the expected historical movement or progress isn’t really there, and *can never be*, given the political nature of human beings.

Although Manent does not attempt to envision a new political order for Europe, the book ends with his account of the kind of political science that might enable Europeans to frame one. It is Aristotelian. Contemporary political science suffers from two principal flaws: it “is not really political, but rather social”—reducing political life to subpolitical components—and it is animated by a “philosophy that is not really practical, that is, that does not quite know what to do with the question, ‘what is to be done?’” (197). But Aristotle’s purpose “is to clarify the deliberations of citizens, no matter the

city to which they belong, in order to improve their political regime, whatever the type of regime” (198). This is “a science of action in general,” “capable of determining what concrete action the acting human being should produce, and therefore a general action or an action in conformity with some general rule, but a determinate action appropriate to the characteristics of the agent and the circumstances of the action” (199). By sundering “facts” from “values,” deliberation from purpose, modern social science has rendered human life incoherent, insofar as human beings take such a science as authoritative.

Having praised Christianity for its discovery of the conscience and of a certain kind of human equality, Manent proceeds to criticize it for “endanger[ing] the political framework of human life by requiring human beings to love their enemies” (205). This disruption of the natural understanding of politics disrupted the philosophic understanding of human action by pointing the intellect toward *unmediated* or apolitical “humanity” and also by so altering the intellect’s sense of human events that it comes to think of itself as *historical*—the intellect BC and AD, as it were. That is, the notion of God’s providential intervention into the flow of human events *outside* the framework of a particular political regime, Israel, takes a step toward the familiar *historicisms* of modernity. These tend to undermine the freedoms of the ancients, the Christians, and the moderns. It is therefore in some respects just as well that the modern West now meets resistance, inasmuch as resistance calls forth the “ancient” virtues of courage, justice, moderation, and wisdom that modern social science neglects but that remain necessary to fulfilling human nature.



## Featured Review

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Pierre Manent, *Seeing Things Politically: Interviews with Bénédicte Delorme-Montini*. Translated by Ralph C. Hancock. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's, 2015, xx + 215 pp., \$30.00 (hardcover).

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*Seeing Things Politically* is a book whose author is Pierre Manent, but which consists of a series of transcribed interviews of him conducted by the French intellectual Bénédicte Delorme-Montini. It is a useful book both for those just getting to know Manent's work and those deeply familiar with it. Here we are not exposed to the Manent of *The City of Man* or *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, who teaches us about political things by communicating his in-depth understanding of great political thinkers and texts. Manent paints with much broader brush strokes in these interviews, a fact that simultaneously prevents him from attempting the same depth as he achieves in other published works and allows him a certain candor absent in them. For these reasons, *Seeing Things Politically* is very thought-provoking and instructive.

The book is divided into five parts, entitled "Apprenticeships," "Philosophy, Politics, and Religion," "From the Modern Moment to Western History," "Teaching Political Philosophy," and "The Common and the Universal." In the first part, a very interesting and largely autobiographical section, we learn about Manent's childhood, during which he was immersed in a Cold War communistic worldview. As he explains, "I have a very vivid memory that everything that was Soviet, or even simply Russian, had a certain aura about

it, a golden glow, and truly belonged to a sacred space” (14). As a result of his exposure to alternative ways of thinking in his primary education, Manent confesses to “taking leave” of communism by the time he reached the *École normale supérieure* in Paris, where the political ideas to which he would eventually commit himself began to take form. In moving on intellectually from communism, however, Manent is quick to add, he was able to avoid a mistake the reader must assume he observed others making, namely, moving on intellectually from politics altogether. As he puts it, “what was important was to understand that the problem with communism was not that it is political, but that its politics are not really good” (29).

The section entitled “Philosophy, Politics, and Religion,” while also autobiographical, is the first section in which Manent begins to reveal the political ideas that have remained with him to the present. In particular, he discusses the influence of Raymond Aron and Leo Strauss on the development of his thought. Aron’s influence was powerful on Manent, who describes his early mentor as alerting him to the fact that there is, in politics, “something to be known” (36). Through Aron’s “patient analysis of the political things themselves” (37) Manent saw through the dismissal of politics that was so large a part of the intellectual French climate at the time. (He mentions Sartre, in particular, as an example of one responsible for such a climate.) Still, even while remaining captivated by Aron’s understanding of the political as well as his “Ciceronian” rhetorical abilities, Manent reports, he began to see the limitations of what Aron could offer him. “I felt the need for a criterion of politics,” he says, “a reference beyond politics that might supply a criterion for politics” (38).

The discovery of precisely this limitation is what led him to the works of Leo Strauss, whom Manent reverently describes as the “great liberator” of his thought. While teaching us to learn from modern thinkers in all their profundity, Strauss also points us to the wisdom of the ancients. Strauss thus liberates us from the prejudice that philosophy inevitably deepens merely with the passage of time. In one of the most arresting images of the book, Manent describes how “in the face of this great orchestra of modern philosophy, we hear Strauss’s discordant voice, at first almost inaudible—a very sober and reticent voice. It is like hearing . . . beside the crescendo of this symphonic orchestra, the austere and virile monody of a Dorian flute” (40). At the same time, Strauss is the antidote to another modern prejudice, namely, the “sociological point of view,” which inclines us to read all thinkers of the past as influenced by the dominant ideas of their times (42–43). This is the best way, Manent seems to suggest, to understand Strauss’s esoteric reading of the history of political

thought. Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Descartes, and Locke (to name just a few) transcend the dominant religious and political ideas that surround them. “Strauss shows,” Manent says, “that at least some minds can liberate themselves completely from society’s pressure in order freely to go about their work, being capable at once of taking account of the interests and prejudices of society and making known to the reader who is sufficiently attentive to the text what he really wants to say that is far removed from the prejudices of society. In this sense, Strauss is indeed a great liberator” (44).

At the same time, Manent makes it clear that Strauss has gone certain places he has not been able to follow, especially when it comes to the relationship between religion and philosophy. Whereas the Thomists who educated Manent emphasized the harmony between faith and reason, Strauss emphasizes the discordance between the *life* of reason, embodied most of all in Socrates, and the *life* of faith. Even if the truths discovered by philosophy are shown to be compatible with those affirmed by faith, this fact alone does not free one from “Strauss’s austere demand that I choose between philosophy and religion.” As to what life he himself has chosen, Manent humbly reports that he is “still looking” (46). Strauss’s superiority over Thomism is more evident, according to Manent, in the realm of political philosophy, which is given the central role it deserves much more in the Straussian system. For instance, Manent complains that Thomists have “moralized and depoliticized Aristotle,” ignoring, for instance, the long and rich political discussions in the middle books of the *Politics* so central to the Stagirite’s thought. Manent thus marvels at the Thomist Jacques Maritain, who “went from being a follower of [the French nationalist Charles] Maurras to a democrat without changing his Thomism” (47).

One of the most pervasive themes of *Seeing Things Politically* is what Manent describes as the three poles of human existence: politics, religion, and philosophy. These, Manent thinks, are the three most serious aspects of human life, and each of them requires, he says, “complete devotion.”

Churchill cannot be a philosopher or a religious man if he wants to be Churchill: he is too busy with “human things.” Strauss and Socrates cannot be statesmen or men of faith: if they want to turn away from human affairs, it is not to attend to the Father’s, but in order to pursue an endless questioning. Likewise, a religious man cannot be a philosopher in the full sense: he can employ philosophic tools very competently...but he has already given his soul to the Answer that precedes all questions, or rather he has answered the Call that precedes all questions. (59–60)

Partisans of these three poles of human existence each have legitimate criticisms of the others. Churchill would rightly blame both the philosopher and the saint for their lack of civic virtue. The philosopher would rightly blame partisans of the political and the religious for cleaving to opinions they cannot show are true. And the religious person rightly blames his counterparts for their inability to be taught by a Wisdom higher than human reason. As for Manent, he appears not to identify squarely with any of these three partisans. If we imagine the three poles representing a kind of triangle, Manent places himself in the middle of that triangle, admiring and learning from the profundity, but also the limitations, of each.

The remaining sections of *Seeing Things Politically* contain very illuminating discussions of some of Manent's favorite subjects, such as modernity, higher education, and the distinctive character of the West. One recurrent theme is what Manent calls the "Ciceronian moment." Just as Cicero found himself "in a sort of no man's land between the city and the empire" (112), humanity has found itself similarly without political coherence at various decisive moments of Western history. This is, perhaps, the best way to sum up Manent's analysis of the present European political situation. As Manent explains, the idea of the nation, the dominant political form of the past few centuries, was "discredited in Europe and appeared more and more as a type of human association belonging to the past." We have now, Manent continues, "envisioned the perspective of a new political form that we call 'Europe,' however this is to be conceived" (145). As Manent fears, there is at present little understanding of this new political form and likewise little understanding of how we will deal with the inevitable problems that will emerge in our transition to it. Somehow the conditions established for the emergence of Europe prevent us from understanding the new political form as anything definite. In a particularly arresting passage, Manent asserts that "European democratic universalism shades into nihilism; it is the fulfillment of nihilism. It consists in saying: Europe is nothing other and wants to be nothing other than pure human universality. It cannot, then, be anything definite; in a very real sense, it wants to be *nothing*, an absence open in every way to the presence of the other; it wants to be nothing itself so that the other, no matter what other, can be everything that it is" (188).

It is impossible either to summarize or criticize the central thesis of this book, since the very form of *Seeing Things Politically* simply prohibits there from being one. All the same, because Manent situates himself inside the triangle of politics, religion, and philosophy, not identifying as a partisan of

any, one can imagine criticisms from any of those partisans whose alleged shortcomings prevent Manent from fully joining their ranks. For instance, Manent spends what amounts to seven or so pages reflecting on the way in which religion prevents one from living a fully human life. As he says, “piety as such leads us to expect a holiness from which one is, in general, naturally quite distant. Thus, the pious and sincere man...cannot help acting as if he experienced feelings that he does not experience, as if he had thoughts of which he cannot in fact conceive, and even as if he saw things he does not see” (61). In other words, there is not so much a coherence between religion and human experience as there is a coherence between religion and what religious people *pretend their experience to be*. Whether Manent intends it or not, this is a damning criticism. One should take special note of the fact that the criticism targets, not religious people, nor even those reputed for their holiness, but “piety as such.” Then again, Manent, in this same section, reminisces fondly of one Aniouta Claudel, who “covered the whole spectrum of religious life and profane life as naturally as can be” (65). In the final analysis, one would need answers to many more questions before fairly taking Manent to task too strongly for his remarks in this section.

More puzzling than Manent’s remarks about religion and piety are his remarks about philosophy and the philosophical life. Without question, Manent’s understanding of that life is inspired by Strauss, whose portrait of Socrates, however “repulsive” (56) that portrait is to Manent, seems to him the most accurate one. In describing Strauss’s account of the philosopher Manent refers to him as one who “separates himself almost entirely from the human being” (48), who “abandon[s] all interest in human things” (49), or who “turns away from human things.” The student of Strauss’s work, it seems to this commentator, can understand these remarks as, at best, an oversimplification. Granted that Strauss conceives the philosopher as a “distinct human type, a type having the characteristic of being ‘more than man’” (50), is not what chiefly characterizes Socratic philosophy, in Strauss’s account, precisely a turn *to the human things*? To be sure, the Socratic turn does nothing to make Socrates and those who follow him more like the rest of humanity. But it is nonetheless humanity, not nature and not the gods, that becomes the primary focus of the philosopher’s gaze.

On one hand, Manent is right to point out that, for Strauss, “all human things and all human concerns reveal themselves [to the philosopher] in all clarity as paltry and ephemeral.” Strauss even adds that the philosopher “is as unconcerned as possible with individual and perishable human beings

and hence also with his own ‘individuality.’”<sup>1</sup> Any yet it is crucial to notice that, for Strauss, these facts reveal only one side of a kind of paradox. Just as the Socratic philosopher is unconcerned with human things, his only access to the higher things he longs to understand is by means of the human. As Strauss puts it in one memorable passage, “why was this same Socrates, who said that the philosopher does not even know the way to the market place, almost constantly in the market place?” Strauss answers his own question a sentence later, calling special attention to the paradoxical nature of the subject matter: “the philosopher’s radical detachment from human beings must then be compatible with an attachment to human beings.”<sup>2</sup> This attachment is, to some degree, pragmatic. In order for philosophers to flourish they must live within organized and civilized societies. But the philosophical attachment to human things goes much further, particularly regarding the attachment between the philosopher and his friends made possible precisely by their shared pursuit of eternal things. As Strauss explains, “of all perishable things known to us, those which reflect that [eternal] order most, or which are most akin to that order, are the souls of men....[The philosopher] admires such men not on account of any services which they may render to him but simply because they are what they are.”<sup>3</sup>

It is not even among Strauss’s controversial views that Socrates’s turn to the human things constitutes a decisive break from all previous philosophers. As he remarks in *Natural Right and History*, “Socrates started not from what is first in itself or first by nature, but from what is first for us, from what comes to sight first, from the phenomena.”<sup>4</sup> This, it seems, is precisely what led him into the market place. In these and many other accounts of the philosophy inspired by Socrates, it is difficult to find anything resembling Manent’s description of a Socrates who “abandon[s] all interest in human things.”

This is, to be sure, a minor criticism of a book that is full of profound and elegantly stated insights, which give the reader a clear and uniquely personal account of one of the world’s brightest political thinkers alive today. Those who read it with open minds will be rewarded with a deeper understanding of those things nearest to Professor Manent’s own mind and heart.

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1963), 211–12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>4</sup> Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 123–24.

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Joel Alden Schlosser, *What Would Socrates Do? Self-Examination, Civic Engagement, and the Politics of Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 212 pp., \$110 (hardcover).

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## Socrates as Civic Activist

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*What Would Socrates Do?*, Joel Alden Schlosser's engaging new book on the man Cicero credited with having first "called philosophy down from heaven, and placed it in cities, and introduced it even into homes, compelling it to inquire into life and customs and things good and evil" (*Tusculan Disputations* 5.10), is animated by a long-standing concern: of what practical use is philosophy? In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates himself seems intent on defending his philosophizing for its usefulness to the city, going so far as to make the remarkable claim that his labors constitute a service to Athens as great as any ever rendered to that city (30a–b). The hard-headed query concerning philosophy's mundane utility—and, by extension, its practical worth—looks to have been as familiar to Socrates as to the obstinate, if intellectually ambitious, contemporary undergraduate who ignores his uncle's best advice about majoring in finance to study the Greeks.

Schlosser locates the origins of his titular and guiding question in reflections prompted, in the first instance, by the rise at colleges across the nation of what is generically known as service learning—a kind of experiential education that validates itself, and the knowledge it seeks to impart, by the self-transformation it purportedly effects. For Schlosser, the moral priority attached by "DukeEngage" (the service learning program instituted in 2007

by Duke University) to social-political “engagement” both challenged him to examine his own teaching of Socratic texts in terms of the priorities of the campaign for service learning and fed his “growing suspicion that we needed to understand the practice of Socrates’ thought and how this practice mattered in its context” (viii). Schlosser, in turn, reviews a number of contemporary attempts to enlist the example and legacy, if not also the dialogical methods, of the historical Socrates in quest of relevant ways to engage seriously with modern society. His introductory chapter begins with an account of a movement inaugurated by Christopher Phillips in the late 1990s, dubbed the “Socrates Cafés.” (In a concluding chapter, Schlosser likewise considers the “Clemente Courses,” instituted by Earl Shorris to promote a Socratic “midwifery of the mind,” aimed at equipping socially and politically impoverished people with the intellectual resources they need to improve their condition.) Phillips invites all who feel the “calling” to participate in “dialogues,” which aim to build communities of Socratically cultivated citizens who can invigorate the democratic polities of which they are a part. In his several books promoting the project, Phillips reports on Socratic gatherings staged not only in cafés, but also in “prisons, retirement facilities, homeless shelters, [and] public housing projects,” which foster common reflection and philosophical inquiry that “everyman” and “everywoman” might claim for his or her own (1–2).

Animated by a shared enthusiasm for serious inquiry, these gatherings aim ultimately to cultivate epistemically capable and morally engaged democratic citizens. However, a broad command of both the popular and scholarly literature concerned with Socrates, which Schlosser displays with consistent agility throughout this book, compels him to take account of arguments that contend for viewing Socrates as an opponent of democracy. Schlosser points to Sheldon Wolin, among others, who portrays Socrates as the progenitor of an ethereal “philosophic politics” that has perpetrated a destructive influence on the “organic and ostensibly genuine political life around it” (4). Schlosser thus arrives at the problem of “how [we properly] characterize Socrates’ relationship to democracy, ancient and modern” (5). He promises, in turn, an extended argument to show us how Socrates’s philosophizing both engaged and challenged the democratic practices and civic culture out of which it emerged in fifth-century Athens. Only once Socrates has been brought into a fully historical and contextual focus, Schlosser argues, can one begin to explore how a contemporary extension of Socratic philosophizing might constructively relate itself to modern democratic life.

The body of Schlosser's book is therefore devoted mostly to the task of reconstructing "the practice of Socrates' thought and how this practice mattered in its context" (viii). To this end, Schlosser utilizes a recent "surge of scholarship" (in particular, the work of Josiah Ober, Kurt Raaflaub, et al.) into the civic practices, ideals, and institutions of ancient Athens—the political world that Socrates actually inhabited (see 6n19). Contemporary political philosophy, Schlosser argues, is greatly advantaged in the quest to comprehend its Socratic origins by new research that supplies "a deeper and more contextual understanding" of fifth-century Athens than has been previously available (6). Schlosser numbers himself, in turn, among those students of ancient political philosophy who seek to trace the formative influence of ancient democracy on Socrates, even as he undertakes likewise to explore Socrates's critical engagement of his city and fellow citizens.

In an opening chapter, Schlosser identifies "five primary and interlocking practices of Athenian democratic politics" that gave shape and direction to Socrates's philosophical endeavor (5). These include certain procedures of "democratic accountability," what the Athenians called *dokimasia* and *euthunai* (chap. 2); various traditional means of education, which Schlosser classifies broadly as "the erotic practices of Athenian democracy" (chap. 3); the practice of *parrhēsia*, or "frank speech" (chap. 4); and *sunousia*, a kind of discursive association that Athenians viewed as a defining feature of their deliberative politics (chap. 5). In chapter 2, then, Schlosser details the public-accountability routine of assembling a jury before which citizens selected for political office would first have to submit to scrutiny (*dokimasia*). Correspondingly, Athens required these same officials to give a public accounting of their tenure—likewise before a jury of fellow citizens selected by lot—upon leaving office (*euthunai*). Once properly situated within its historical context, Schlosser argues, Socrates's practice of philosophy can be recognized as a linear extension of what J. Peter Euben has called "a culture of scrutiny and accountability," rather than the original appearance of a kind of "dissident citizenship," as Dana Villa and other proponents of the case for "Socratic citizenship" have argued (30–31). Schlosser thus emphasizes that "[Socratic] philosophy emerges from the particular situation of the democratic polis; even while it transforms aspects of this political life it remains indebted to it" (31).

Nevertheless, Schlosser readily concedes that "Socrates does not explicitly refer to any of the institutions of accountability extant in Athens." He insists, however, that Socrates's philosophizing can be brought fully into focus only if one recognizes that he "co-opted practices of accountability and

redeployed them as part of philosophy” (32). In sum, it is only by tracing the distinctive features of Socrates’s mode of philosophizing back to their political-cultural wellspring, carefully excavating the ways in which Socrates looks to be indebted to the democratic practices and institutions of his city, that we approach a genuine understanding of his activity. One might reasonably quibble with Schlosser’s consistent identification of each of the practices he examines as “democratic,” particularly since he never brings fully into view the often complex genealogies underlying them (especially those Schlosser calls “the erotic practices of Athenian democracy”), acknowledging in the process that the civic culture of fifth-century Athens was in fact a tangled amalgam of aristocratic and democratic elements. To an important extent, moreover, Socrates’s philosophizing involved him more consistently with Athens’s aristocratic ways and families than with the city’s democratic institutions and mainstays. His routine of spending long hours around the gymnasium; his circle of admirers and devoted interlocutors; his important friendships (including, of course, his celebrated involvement with Alcibiades); not to mention the moral focus of so many of his interrogations, beginning with his abiding interest in the elite ideal of the fully turned-out gentleman, *kalos kagathos*, all point to the importance of aristocratic Athens for Socrates.

More significant, however, is the connection that Schlosser repeatedly makes between the practices of Athens’s democratic politics and Socrates’s innovative manner of philosophizing. Standing at the center of the book’s sustained argument, this connection raises a set of philosophically thorny questions that deserve some sustained consideration. Schlosser implies that, however much he may strive to escape the shadowy cave of opinion for sunswept realms of knowledge lying beyond the walls of any particular polity, the philosopher remains inescapably enchained to his culture and historical milieu. Schlosser acknowledges this underlying commitment to the encompassing horizon of history when he introduces the “general orientation” of his book with a discussion of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus.” On Bourdieu’s account, the habitus necessarily affords only a limited, “subjective” vantage point to those standing within it (see esp. Bourdieu’s discussion of “structures and the habitus” in chap. 2 of his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*), an outpost from which one might expect even Socrates to find himself at a loss to achieve full consciousness of the social-political influences governing his own endeavor. It follows that Schlosser must hang a towering question mark over Plato’s own indelible portrait of the philosophic quest (articulated by none other than Socrates, of course, in the *Republic*), which Plato represents as a heroic trek from the stygian rule of opinion to

the luminous rationality and self-rule of the wise, or from the particularity and partiality of culture to the universality of nature. Schlosser sums up the Bourdieusian cast of his broad argument in these terms: Socrates's philosophizing is properly understood as a discrete but dependent part of "the Athenian democratic habitus"; it represents, in the end, simply a "response," arising within a "set of responses," that together constitute an evolving interplay of "subjective forms of life" and "objective circumstances" (9–10).

This "general orientation" thus raises the difficult question whether Socratic philosophizing was so much the outgrowth of Athens's democratic habitus that it could truly exist only there and then. Moreover, would the historical Socrates have fully comprehended how derivative of, and dependent on, the habitus of Athens his philosophical activity was? Correspondingly, we must wonder if our Bourdieusian insight into the social-historical origins of Socrates's practice of philosophy does not imply that we today can hope to understand Socrates even better than he understood himself. But, if so, what are we ultimately to make of our guiding question concerning what Socrates himself would do?

In a concluding chapter, Schlosser attempts to sum up what those seeking to foster a greater engagement with contemporary democracy might learn from an account of Socratic philosophizing properly contextualized within the habitus of fifth-century Athenian democracy. He argues that his work of reconstruction makes it possible to recognize that "an underlying logic," which determines the practice of the Socrates Cafés, is "the resolute openness characteristic of Socrates' philosophy" as well (168). We encounter this same radical openness, for example, "when Socrates engages foreigners like Meno or *hetairai* like Theodote—not to mention Meno's slave" (168). However, while quick to identify this "intellectual egalitarianism" with the political culture of democratic Athens, Schlosser fails to situate it within the philosopher's own conception of his activity as a quest to get beyond the parochial confines of culture. So situated, this logic of openness ties itself most directly to philosophy's defining ambition to comprehend the truth in all its universality, however far beyond the walls of the Athenian habitus that might lead. Schlosser nevertheless concedes that democracy's practices of accountability and "frank speech" (*parrhēsia*) cannot in this instance fully account for philosophy's characteristic impulse to push these practices "beyond the pale of citizenship, showing that the contingent boundaries of the polis cannot limit philosophical investigation" (168).

This concession again raises a key question, one Schlosser unfortunately never takes up. How is it possible for philosophical investigation to move

beyond the “contingent boundaries” of Athens’s democratic habitus, unless philosophy as a pursuit is not ultimately bound by any particular habitus, unless Socratic philosophizing is more than simply one of a “set of responses” that constitute the Athenian habitus? As Schlosser notes, “the radical edge of [Socrates’s] philosophy did not sit easily with many of his fellow citizens.” And yet, “this radical edge was an essential feature: Given [philosophy’s] commitment to continuous, unremitting inquiry Socrates could not stop at the basic presuppositions of the Athenian polis” (169). But does Schlosser not thereby imply that philosophy must stand, in its way, over against the habitus, in order to conduct its “unremitting inquiry” into the contingent structure of understanding that defines every habitus? If so, it seems likewise to follow that philosophy stands in persistent tension with the city, even with democratic Athens. By the same token, Bourdieu’s evolving interplay of “subjective forms of life” and “objective circumstances” begins to look like so many regimes of opinion, which Socrates’s Delphic vocation requires that he put to the test of his *elenchus*. One might further conclude that Socrates’s labor is not truly civic in nature, at least in the sense of devotedly serving one or another of the regimes of opinion.

In the end, the fact that “Socrates’ philosophy does not always align so snugly with the democracy around it” proves problematic for Schlosser’s guiding task of recovering a Socrates who might offer direction to contemporary civic and service education (169). It is, moreover, the more encompassing “perspective of civic engagement” that brings the limitations of even the reconstructed Socrates into view. In particular, Schlosser faults Socrates for the fact that his “philosophy’s axiom of equality only went so far.” This deficit leads Schlosser to consider ways of “going beyond [the] limitations of the reconstructed Socrates” (173) in search of “a more activist Socrates” (172). Reconsidering the Clemente Courses and the Socrates Cafés in this light, Schlosser now discovers that they “model how the radical, fearless, and intersubjective practices of collective examination can exist outside the long shadow of Socrates while still being inspired by his original practice” (174). That is to say, these contemporary examples of “Socratic engagement” appear to have already surpassed the practice and endeavor of the historic Socrates, at least as far as the project of democratic self-examination and civic engagement goes. Schlosser’s reconstruction of Socrates ultimately establishes that contemporary “intersubjective practices of collective examination” are already superior to anything modeled by Socrates. As a consequence, however, we are left finally to ponder the apparent futility of our asking, in this case, “What would Socrates do?”

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David N. Levy, *Wily Elites and Spirited Peoples in Machiavelli's Republicanism*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014, xv + 147 pp., \$80 (hardcover).

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David N. Levy's book begins by stating that Machiavelli's argument about conflict and liberty, five centuries after he made it, "has lost none of its explanatory power, and it remains as provocative as ever." In this famous argument, found early in his *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli explains that republican liberty derives from the conflict between the people and the great. He highlights ancient Rome as the most striking example of class disunion and liberty, which is then used as the basis for a general theory on the salutary effects of conflict in republics. Levy's book is a thoughtful exposition of this argument, which he believes (and many would agree) is one of Machiavelli's greatest contributions to the history of political ideas. As a result, Levy does not offer some bold or novel interpretation of Machiavelli, but rather a very clear, forceful, and remarkably succinct account of the conflict between the great and the people in the *Discourses* (and also *The Prince*). This study is enriched with insightful engagements with several major interpreters of Machiavelli, including Quentin Skinner, J. G. A. Pocock, and Leo Strauss. While the book succeeds in all these tasks, it especially provides a very clear and careful exposition of the argument's implications for our contemporary understanding of democracy and thus it is highly recommended for all students and interpreters of Machiavelli.

*Wily Elites and Spirited Peoples* contains six chapters, plus a substantial introduction. The introduction argues for the importance of Machiavelli's conflict argument and why it is necessary to revisit it in our democratic age.

The first chapter is, sensibly enough, an explanation of the class conflict argument found in the *Discourses*. For Machiavelli, the two classes are derived from two distinct desires: the desire to acquire and to dominate, possessed by the great (who are few), and the desire to be safe and to not be dominated, possessed by the many. These desires and their classes, or “humors” as Machiavelli sometimes calls them (after the long-standing ancient humoral theory of the body), are ineradicable. They also inevitably clash. But since this clash is also essential to maintaining liberty, it is also *desirable*. But there is more to the argument: in order to maintain the conflict, the republic also needs to expand, bringing into play a host of new challenges and problems. The second chapter, “War, Empire, and Democracy,” explains Machiavelli’s teaching on expansion and warfare, as it relates to the conflict between the great and the many. His third chapter, “Corruption, Its Causes, Uses, and Remedies,” illuminates Machiavelli’s thoughts on the many endemic corruptions and dangers in the body politic that alter the classes, their conflict, and its effects. In the fourth chapter, “The Princely Republic,” Levy argues for an underlying unity between the *Discourses* and *The Prince* on the class conflict teaching. Here Levy is the most interpretively controversial, but the chapter is captivating and persuasive. Levy ends the book with a conclusion and an appended chapter on the interpretation of Machiavelli and liberalism.

One of the most striking successes of Levy’s work is that he engages with some of the most significant and distinguished interpretations of Machiavelli. In fact, he positions his book as a corrective to Quentin Skinner’s understanding of Machiavelli as providing a middle ground between modern egoistic freedom and Aristotelian civic virtue. Instead Levy sees Machiavelli as a liberal thinker with a “positive” view of liberty (rather than a “negative,” or freedom-from view of liberty) yet one who also departs from ancient civic virtue. Nevertheless, Levy takes Skinner’s view seriously, and incorporates his insights. Levy also respects the interpretations of many others, including Strauss and Harvey C. Mansfield. This thoughtful engagement with such serious sources is refreshing to read as it opens one to an inclusive study of several schools of thought and interpretation. Yet Levy’s use of secondary sources is still quite succinct and to the point. This is not a book filled with impenetrable footnotes.

Levy’s book provokes thought about the meaning and importance of Machiavelli’s teaching for contemporary democratic thought. In particular, Levy stresses Machiavelli’s distinction as a liberal thinker, that is, as a proponent of regimes aiming at liberty, yet one who thinks entirely without

any substantive theory of—or even any oblique reference to—the basic *rights* that a political order is founded on or ought to protect. What then of our pluralistic democracies, with strong rights-based traditions, and large middle classes that are comprised neither wholly of the “great” nor of the “people”? Are current Western democracies a counterpoint to Machiavelli’s argument that class conflict is necessary for liberty? Levy does not provide expansive answers to these questions. Instead, he is content to skillfully guide us through Machiavelli’s *Discourses*, expose the compelling theory of the great and the many, and provoke serious questions regarding liberal political thought and practice today.

There is a plethora of available interpretations of Machiavelli, and not everyone will agree with Levy’s arguments or analysis. Yet it cannot be denied that Levy began the book with an indisputable truth, and spends six very readable chapters demonstrating it: Machiavelli’s works have an enduring power to explain political phenomena and to provoke profound questions.



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Gene Fendt, *Comic Cure for Delusional Democracy*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014, 314 pp., \$100.00 (hardcover).

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Gene Fendt's book carries the well-waved flag of Plato's *Republic* (xx). Still, no book that attempts a new reading of the most famous book of political philosophy, and is, moreover, based on more than twenty-five years of teaching the *Republic* (xxiii–xxiv), should be dismissed on account of the apparent familiarity of its subject, even if “various parts or combination of parts” have been previously published.

The book follows the path, inaugurated or recovered in the modern era by Leo Strauss, of taking into account the dramatic setting and the characters of the dialogue, although in following this less-traveled road the author seems more indebted to the work of Ferrari, Griswold, Blondell, and even to Rosen and Roochnik<sup>1</sup> than to Strauss's naive readings. Whatever the inspiration, Fendt's main justification for his new venture into Plato's *Republic* is the idea that it is necessary to explore fully the “mimetic” (2–10) nature of the dialogue. Exploring mimesis requires the simultaneous reading of several aspects of the dialogue: what Socrates says, the conversion of Socrates's interlocutors—that is, the revelation of the “depth of political and individual delusion in the interlocutors”—and the consequent setting up of “an artistic mimetic therapy for readers through his work of art” (10). The reader must thus be prepared to sit on the psychotherapist's sofa and submit to therapy and pharmaceutical medication.

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<sup>1</sup> The author appears to rely on David Roochnik's geometry of regimes, and even, in spite of stated reservations (78n2), on Derrida's pharmacy.

The reader that Fendt has in mind is not the ancient reader of the fourth century BC, nor a modern scholar willing to sit at Plato's feet to carefully listen to the great master, but present-day characters who, like us, stand "within the context of contemporary political theorizing" (xx), in spite of the author's attempts to invoke Plato in the Academy (264). The *Comic Cure* is divided into six chapters, with an interlude between chapters 4 and 5 on the analogy of the soul and the city and the tripartition of the soul, and a conclusion of sorts, about "liturgical catharsis," titled "Coda and Prelude." Each chapter has a dominant theme and considers a modern topic while following the arrangement of Plato's dialogue, which may be helpful as an instrument for teaching.

The first chapter, "Madman at the Door," deals with Cephalus's abandonment of his definition of justice and with Thrasymachus's insult in Book I (24–28), rushes through Book II as it deals with the medicinal role of the spoken lie (as opposed to the lie in the soul), and then returns to Cephalus (28–36). The chapter begins with a confrontation with Freud, but moves quickly and in the end dismisses postmodernism as a whole. "Psyche's Pharmacy" (chap. 2) takes its bearing from the doctor's *pharmakon* and explores Books II and III, especially the "mythos" of earth and blood (70–78). The core of the work appears to begin in chapter 3, "Enlarging Homer: An Aristophanic Sex Comedy," a chapter that explains the role of ridicule through Books V–VI, organized around the *Republic's* famous three waves (90–105). "Out of the Cave" (chap. 4) dwells on the therapeutic role of the three central metaphors of cave, line, and sun (111–30). Following that, the curing process is exhibited (131–46). After a brief interlude, Fendt attacks "number crunching" in the social sciences, appealing to "the six geometries of regime" of David Roochnik. The final chapter is indeed "polymorphous" and gathers the very different subjects of desire, delusions, and poetry present at the end of Plato's *Republic*.

Fendt's book is peculiar, first in style, which involves an odd mixture of modern poetry (e.g., Jack Gilbert), colloquial language, and semierudite references to Shakespeare and other classics, coupled with sheer language perfumery. To take one example of the style that almost pervades the book: "the true relation is one of natural and necessary complementarity in which an autarchic essentialism of somatic sexual difference is as mistaken as an ideal antimateriality" (86). Such prose only *almost* pervades it, however, because these sentences are intermingled with others of a very different sort. Speaking about the sexes, Fendt claims that the *Republic* is a "three-book *interruptus*" (84); speaking of the matchmaking of the warriors as in dog

breeding, Fendt asserts: “Perhaps if we forget the gods, this is what we come to: woof!” (99). This strange melange seems to be a deliberate move on the part of the author: “I hope my language throughout this chapter proves illustrative” of the base or ugly (105n9). The French say: *noblesse oblige*. Here the motto may be *mimesis oblige*.

Leo Strauss once commented, in his lectures on the problem of Socrates, that “in glancing at modern interpretations of the Aristophanean comedies, one is struck by the preoccupation of modern scholars with the political background and the political meaning of the comedies. It is as if these scholars were about to forget, or had already forgotten, that they are dealing with comedies. When about to enter a place at which we are meant to laugh and to enjoy ourselves, we must first cross a picket line of black coated ushers exuding deadly and deadening seriousness.”<sup>2</sup> Fendt is willing to correct this situation with these humorous remarks, but the effect is dubious.

It is dubious, not only because of its style but because the author seeks a (scientific) confirmation of some of his theses in very peculiar places, such as brain synapses. He asserts, for example, that “Platonic dialogues are not merely intellectual enterprises” (16) but mimetic ones, and that bodily responses are mimetic too and not representations. According to him confirmation can be found in Girard’s biological studies of the prefrontal cortex (6–8, with nn.). More important, Freud is summarily discarded and yet guides the author through chapters 1 and 2.

Let us behave as Jane Austen and veil the all too numerous faux pas. The author presents his doubts concerning the attitudes of both political theorists and Plato scholars. He is right in fearing both. We may be deeply sympathetic to most of Fendt’s misgivings: illiberal friends of democracy, postmodernism, a certain shallowness in much current work in the social sciences, large expenditures on football stadiums at American universities that are quasi-Dionysian temples (264; cf. *Rep.* 492b), among other phenomena that outrage the author. But I find it too daring to think that a single page in the *Republic*, powerful medicine as it is, can take care of all postmodern political theory (24ff.) or any of the other evils of the new century once and for all.

Concerning the centrality of comedy and the (correctly identified) parallels between Book V of the *Republic* and Aristophanes’s works, it is remarkable that some obvious references are missing. Little is said of the representation of the

<sup>2</sup> Leo Strauss, “The Origins of Political Science and the Problem of Socrates,” *Interpretation* 23, no. 2 (1996): 142.

*Assembly of Women* in Athens in 392, some ten or twenty years before the composition of the *Republic* (assuming it was composed between 380 and 369 BC).

A reader of Leo Strauss knows where to find the connections. But there are a couple of mandatory references missing entirely: Debra Nails's book, or Douglass Parker's introduction to the edition of Aristophanes and the alternative theory of Holger Thesleff, or even Aristotle.<sup>3</sup> Debra Nails's prosopography is mentioned but seldom (never?) used, which looks odd considering the promised attention to Plato's characters. All these fundamental works, including Strauss's, are merely ignored.

Considering the amount and depth of scholarship about the parallels between the soul and the city, the situation is even more discouraging in the Interlude, which would not be such a serious matter if the author had not acknowledged that "the main points of these last two chapters sail straight into numerous intense debates in the scholarship" (xvii). We could say that Fendt's overwhelming concern with modern political theory no doubt contributes unwittingly to the comical cure that he seeks.

Stylistic peculiarities and bibliographical omissions could easily be overlooked if the author presented valuable insights. The language, however, appears to confuse the reader if not the author. The attempt to make the book more modern is understandable, since "we all have been in the cave of our bodies' desires and of cultural mimesis (if not in front of a tv screen or web browsing computer) since childhood, living what is customary" (131).

It's unclear how therapeutic it can be to a poorly educated young man to acknowledge that "if all desires are interests and all interests have rights, it is not in the interest of the majority interest to allow reason to work any further—unless reason has a right *and* an interest intending a good, and therefore a right that *exceeds every other interest or combination thereof*. Such is the elitism of truth. But that posits a telic perfection to human nature, a purpose for polity, and (truly) no merely democratically procedural rights and justice or postmodern denial of reason's capacity for achieving or deciding about truth claims can bear to listen to that" (133–34).

The emphasis on therapy, sickness, and recovery may indeed be seriously misguided. It does not appear that Plato's characters in the *Republic*

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<sup>3</sup> Debra Nails, *Agora, Academia and the Conduct of Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1995), 118–21; Aristophanes, *The Congresswomen*, ed. Douglass Parker (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969); Holger Thesleff, *Studies in Platonic Chronology* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1982), 103–4.

“seem to be in the modern political theorist’s mythic state of nature” and that “Plato presents the imaginary origin of modern politics in the simplest of pictures: a small group, thrown together in one place, with limited common resources—each other and the festival night” (132). The small group is certainly *not* in the modern state of nature. Nor, to paraphrase Bruell (on Rawls), should we assume that everyone is a well-bred, academic gentleman whose only problem is too much TV or internet browsing. Plato seems concerned with genuine insights, removing false opinions, though health of soul comes from that. But the intention is not therapeutic. It is truth loving—whether it harms you or not.

True, what justice is and its defense in the *Republic* is not a mere theoretical question. The characters are concerned with what they should do with their lives, and how they should live in order to be happy, which is very different from aiming for a Kantian “kingdom of ends” (268). It is hard to see how Fendt’s book as a whole is therapeutic, except perhaps in the sense that if the reader is able to endure it until the end he achieves an important victory over himself. This is not to say that the book is not often readable and even full of interesting insights. Although most references to other dialogues such as the *Euthyphro* (13), *Meno* (32), and *Phaedrus* (15 etc.) are too summary and too well known to be of any interest, many pages of the book are impressive in showing the familiarity of many long-lasting conversations about the *Republic*. The baroque sentences, however, are enough to make one appreciate the therapeutic qualities of rereading Orwell’s “Politics and the English Language.”



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David Peddle, *The Religious Origins of American Freedom and Equality: A Response to John Rawls*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014, 135 pp., \$75 (hardcover).

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Books that critique the thought of John Rawls are usually either friendly nudges or adversarial rebukes. Those who admire him, especially his students, apologetically offer small deviations from the details of his theory, while those who loathe him are eager to administer an academic browbeating. The two sides find it increasingly difficult to enter into discussion, disagreeing as they do on the purpose of philosophic inquiry and the ends of political life.

A great merit of David Peddle's *The Religious Origins of American Freedom and Equality* is that it avoids both extremes of the Rawls debate, and instead treats him as an important thinker of the twentieth century who pays inadequate attention to the historical roots of his theory of justice. Rawls's famous two principles of justice aim at securing the liberty and equality for all citizens without acknowledging anyone's religious or metaphysical conceptions of the good. Peddle argues that such an approach, however attractive to the postmodern mind, wishes to enjoy fruits without the tree that nourishes them.

A second merit of Peddle's efforts is his attention to the later, more political work of Rawls, associated above all with *Political Liberalism* (1993). While much of Peddle's argument about the religious origins of freedom and equality would hold even in the context of *A Theory of Justice* (1971), it is all the more pertinent in relation to Rawls's more mature views, particularly

as they relate to jurisprudence in the United States. Peddle points out, correctly I think, that Rawls understands citizenship, politics, and culture from the institutional perspective of the Supreme Court. *Political Liberalism* carries to a higher order of abstraction the Jeffersonian notion, often assumed by the Court during Rawls's lifetime, that the First Amendment separates church and state. Rawls adopts this idea without much probing, and it is this easy acceptance that Peddle finds most precarious in Rawls's theory. Liberalism's roots, Peddle argues, grow out of and not separate from the Christian Reformation.

The book is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1, which serves as an introduction for the work as a whole, explains why the dichotomous metaphor separating church and state is problematic. On a practical level, the more that religious beliefs are treated equally with private opinions, the harder it becomes to justify the First Amendment's guarantee of free exercise. This is concerning to Peddle, but he is more troubled by the historical inaccuracy in Rawls's account of liberalism's development in America, which pays no heed to the theology of New England Puritans. The depiction of Rawls's shortcomings is sharpened in chapter 2, where Peddle offers a brief account of the main points of *Political Liberalism*, reviewing such things as public reason and the overlapping consensus. Peddle then leans heavily on existing critiques of Rawls to bolster his claim that Rawls and the Supreme Court fundamentally misunderstand religion's place in a liberal regime.

Chapter 3 argues that liberalism developed out of the teachings of John Calvin. Peddle argues that early Americans were engaged in a long and deliberate dispute over the meaning and validity of Calvinism, making it necessary to return to Calvin's teachings in order to understand the foundational ideas of political life in America. Calvin's view of the sanctity of every individual's conscience is of particular importance in this regard. As Peddle explains, Calvin taught that God is absolutely sovereign and that therefore justification is determined by faith alone, because justification by works would give humans a positive role in their salvation, thus detracting from God's sovereignty. The result of this teaching is an emphasis on the conscience of individuals and not their outward conformity to political or religious laws. Freed from law, followers of Calvin, such as the Puritans, voluntarily adopted the teachings of scripture for both their religious and political communities. Colonial Americans melded their Calvinism with the Enlightenment teachings, such as those of Descartes, Locke, and Kant, which ground moral knowledge on the inner self, treat humans as fundamentally equal in relation to God, and derive freedom from the individual's personal relationship to the divine.

Peddle explains more particularly in chapter 4 how the American Puritans worked from Calvinism toward ideas that converge with Enlightenment liberalism. These early settlers of New England believed in a covenant theology that understood conversion in terms of a contract between mortal men and an eternal God. The importance of the individual in entering the contract through an inward action of the will is crucial. But humans also have to relate to one another outwardly, leading to voluntary compacts for churches and cities, both of which were to be established consensually. The first of these, religious congregations, were for those whose voluntary act of faith established their standing with God. The second, what we might call the state, established common rules for believers and nonbelievers alike. These two communities were distinct but far from oppositional. The laws of the city often reflected the teachings of scripture and in doing so did no harm to the desired differences between the two. The Great Awakening furthered principles of liberalism, Peddle explains, by welcoming a great diversity of expressions of conversion and faith.

The final chapter returns to the Rawlsian conception of liberalism and shows how its treatment of the Constitution's First Amendment ignores the Calvinist and Puritan foundations of both liberty and equality. Insisting on the strict separation of church and state, which is to say the complete privatization of religion, prevents citizens from translating important insights from their religious convictions to the secular realm, thus creating a duality that earlier forms of liberalism never demanded. Peddle sees Lockean thought as being in the same orbit as Puritan theology and therefore complementary; Rawlsian liberalism, by contrast, is far less liberal than its earlier precursors. Peddle prefers instead the work of Jürgen Habermas who teaches that religious views cannot be assumed to be merely subjective, but are instead capable of producing real insight.

Though he convincingly shows that Rawls did not adequately examine the historical and theological roots of liberty and equality in America, one might question Peddle on whether Rawls is actually departing from Calvinism and Puritanism to the extent that Peddle claims. Calvin's emphasis on the inward—or private—conscience of the individual and the voluntary nature of associations may set a tune that Rawls is not out of step with, but rather advancing. Public reason is, in an admittedly secular way, quite puritanical and demands outward signs of inner acceptance, though it is now called reflective equilibrium instead of faith. In short, it might be Rawls and not Habermas who more closely parallels Calvinist thought.

However one comes down on Calvin's legacy in modern America, Peddle's book has the virtue of reminding us of the importance that religion played in America's most formative years. It would be perilous to go forward forgetting from whence we came and the ideas that have shaped us. Peddle does a commendable job at keeping both directions in mind and what he has to say should be taken seriously by both the friends and foes of Rawls's political theory.

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Eva Brann, *Un-Willing: An Inquiry into the Rise of Will's Power and an Attempt to Undo It*. Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2014, xiv + 367 pp., \$35 (paperback).

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If you want a dry, scholarly account of the concept of the will, then do not read this book; if you want a superficial recitation of the history of the will over some two millennia, then do not read this book; or if you want an uncritical, philosophical analysis of the will in Western thought, then do not read this book. But if you desire scholarship, history, and philosophy in the same volume, all at an uncommonly elevated level, then be prepared to invest the requisite time in reading this book. Philosophically, Brann brings decades of learning and interpretive skill to making sense of this most critical concept; historically, she canvasses the most important thinkers of the Western tradition; and in terms of scholarship, her use of primary sources and insistence on returning to the original meaning of the vocabulary employed by the authors is unparalleled (see esp. 111–16). But let the reader be forewarned: this is hardly an easy book, although it is rich and rewarding. As a longtime tutor at St. John's College (Annapolis), Brann engages the reader in a 300-page conversation—and an intimate one at that. She summarizes, explicates, interprets, suggests, agrees, disagrees, puzzles, exhorts, challenges, dismisses, and so on, with a multitudinous array of thinkers. Readers will do the same as they wrestle with Brann's analyses and conclusions. It is, in many ways, like a Socratic conversation, with each and every reader intervening in the exposition to ask his own questions as he engages with hers.

Brann comes to this study after having examined “three facets of our interiority that had previously fascinated me”: imagination, time, and negation (see 265n4 for the references). “The will was nowhere to be found in this trilogy, and I wondered why. My eventual answer was just the thesis of this book. Imagination, time, negation seem to me to be indefeasible aspects of our inner life: its scene, its treasure, its insight. The will, however, is not a *necessary* facet of our own interiority. Why not?” (xii–xiii). Her opening thesis is provocative but perhaps not startlingly original, namely, that it is the “*sense of sin*” that gives birth to the will: “I will claim that sin is the first parent of will, and will is a progeny that then outgrows and squelches its instigator” (1). Brann does not, however, wish to “undo” the will (as indicated in her subtitle) because she wishes to “undo” sin: this becomes clearer as the book progresses. To put it baldly, but not completely, the will moves from commonsense articulations of phenomena presented to it to a sharp-edged sword lacerating at times the very individual who wills. In other words, the character and conclusions of the will become increasingly complex (cf. the discussion of Hegel [137–47]) and unreal (cf. the discussion of academic compatibilism [175–86], and modern neuroscience and psychiatry [187–204]). (Hobbes [70–74] and Locke [75–81] seem to be the lone exceptions here as the will’s import philosophically is diminished.) Brann reveals this most poignantly in her chapter on Rousseau, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, and her revulsion is palpable (120–22, 135; cf. 155). She is a bit gentler with Kant (88–103) and Sartre (163–74), but equally devastating in her comments. Although Brann is hardly the first one to point out the “dangerous consequences” of Kant’s morality (92), she wonders whether it is right to betray a friend (i.e., to be truthful and not to lie) held up in your house when the police come looking for him. “To those of us who have lived in a modern police state, this logical purity looks like moral insanity” (93). If Kant would have lived in the twentieth century, perhaps he would have admitted that lying is permissible as a universal maxim if the regime in which you live is nothing other than a Big Lie—do unto them as they do unto you. As for Sartre, the free will transmogrifies itself into willed freedom, and the will now comes second and freedom first. “Choosing, deciding are commonly considered the specific work of the will: Sartre has just intimated that choosing, the choice that makes us what we are, *precedes* the will” (170). How this ultimately makes sense is unclear, and thus existentialism itself becomes questionable as a genuine philosophical possibility, let alone a fundamental description of human reality.

The high points of Brann’s discussion are surely the chapter sections on Augustine (23–37) and Aquinas (44–60): here we see the concept of the (free)

will take shape for the first time, and then thoughtful (Aristotelian) common sense begins to understand and to unpack it. There is a wonderful freshness and openness to these sections, where concepts we take for granted today had to be explained for the first time and had to be made convincing. Brann is certainly sympathetic to both thinkers, and gives the best case possible—but as her discussion makes clear (especially with Augustine), the reader might be as perplexed as Evodius at the end of the day as to how we can knowingly do evil and be held responsible for it in the presence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God (cf. 25ff., 177). Brann puts this conundrum in simple terms: “Was the will invented or discovered?” (25). One is tempted to say that it was discovered because it had to be, or invented because it needed to be—how otherwise could sin make sense? But this problem or question is hardly limited to Augustine and Aquinas—indeed, one of the leitmotifs of the book as a whole is how the question of God or religion pervades every discussion of the will. And how could it not, given Brann’s original thesis? Behind all discussions of the will, whether intended or not, conscious or unconscious, one must come to grips with the Christian dispensation. If the concept of sin gives rise to the concept of the will, then all accounts of the will must sooner or later come to terms with this fact. The question of the will is nothing less than the question of sin and/or of moral responsibility, however understood.

But this perplexity leads us back to the beginning of Brann’s discussion—the “pre-volitional” (233) and unwilled Greeks. There is no doubt that she is sympathetic to their viewpoints as well, even if she gives them only a small amount of the text (1–13) (no surprise here, as her project is the will, not “before will” [1]). But one massive question remains once one finishes the book, and especially reconsidering the conclusion and the first chapter. Did the Greeks simply get it wrong on the matter of the will? Or is the entire history of philosophy nothing more than the accumulated but unnoticed sediment (cf. 111) of a misguided concept? If the latter, then perhaps Brann should have divided her book into two sections: 150 pages on the Greeks, and 150 pages on Augustine and Aquinas! At all events, the question still remains: Is there such a thing as the will, whether free, determined, neither, or both (all of these perspectives are discussed in the book, and then some)? However one decides this question, Brann’s book is a good place to start thinking about it.



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Tucker Landy, *After Leo Strauss: New Perspectives in Platonic Political Philosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014, 229 pp., \$80 (hardcover).

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Tucker Landy's book is a call for a post-Straussian perspective in political philosophy. It claims that we should "move beyond" Strauss but that moving beyond is not abandoning him (1). More precisely, Landy's proposition is to reinvestigate Platonic political philosophy in order to overcome the dualisms that Strauss formulated throughout his rediscovery of Plato: the ancients and the moderns, philosophy and the city, philosophy and poetry, and, perhaps, Athens and Jerusalem.

Landy correctly notes at the beginning of his book that Strauss, in the introduction of *Natural Right and History*, raises the question of the relationship of natural philosophy and natural right without providing any explicit answer. If the discoveries of modern natural science are true and if classical natural right is integral with a teleological view of the universe, how can we claim a recovery of classical natural right? Whereas Strauss seems to acknowledge the "victory" of modern science but still argues for the importance of a return to classical political philosophy, Landy infers—as have other scholars<sup>1</sup>—that he "focused on an interpretation of natural right, probably developed from an esoteric reading of Plato, that is independent of cosmology, or at least independent of the Aristotelian teleological view of the cosmos" (27).

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<sup>1</sup> Landy refers to Catherine Zuckert and Michael Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 36–39. See as well Steven B. Smith, *Reading Leo Strauss: Politics, Philosophy, Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 100–103.

This attempt seems to be for Landy a mere intellectual shortcut. Arguing that Strauss's "conclusion" of the victory of modern nonteleological science is "premature," the author tries to show that the current state of natural sciences cannot allow a hasty conclusion of the impossibility of a teleological order in nature. This first chapter is to my view the most interesting and convincing chapter of Landy's book: interesting because this highly important theme is largely neglected by Straussian scholars who generally take for granted the possibility of a nonmetaphysical recovery of classical natural right, and convincing because inasmuch as his postulate is correct, we have to ask ourselves whether Strauss's claim of a nonmetaphysical recovery of ancient thought was deduced from the modern critique of metaphysics or if it stands by itself as "true Platonism."

The problem is that Landy settles this question at the very beginning: Strauss would have interpreted the ancients without metaphysics because he would have recognized the victory of modern science. Hence, as long as modern science's common claims on these matters can be proved wrong, it would be "post-Straussian" to restore the ancient thought *along with* its metaphysics. This perspective, however, eclipses the context of Strauss's discovery of al-Farabi's "true Platonism" and does not argue with the idea that this specific tradition of Platonic political philosophy would be the one and true original forgetting of the Western philosophical tradition. Landy notes that this discovery rests on the presupposition of esoteric writing, which he *refuses* but does not try to *refute*. If Straussian scholars are eager to aim at demonstrations of the existence of such an art of writing,<sup>2</sup> we should expect that those who would like to "move beyond" Straussian interpretations give rational reasons against the existence of the *ars occultandi* in the tradition of political philosophy. These evidences would be indeed of a great usefulness because if Strauss did really claim a *discovery* of a forgotten Plato, esotericism is a fundamental condition of this claim. With his assumption—which I believe to be hasty—that this esoteric return to this "softened" Plato was a mere strategic response to the "end of metaphysics" rather than an authentic discovery, Landy seems to have missed the heart of this problem.

Following Strauss's path, Landy thinks that a departure from Nietzschean thought is a prime condition of a turn to Platonic philosophy. In his third chapter Landy thus introduces us to his new reading of Plato through a

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<sup>2</sup> See for instance Arthur M. Mezler, *Philosophy Between the Lines: The Lost History of Esoteric Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014) and Ronna Burger, *Plato's "Phaedrus": A Defense of a Philosophical Art of Writing* (Tuscaloosa: Alabama University Press, 1980).

critique of Nietzsche's Plato. The aim of these pages is to show that Nietzsche's critique of Plato is based on a "reductionism" of thinking to "vitalism," one that leads to the superiority of spiritedness (*thumos*) over reason (*logos*) and hence of *life* over the examined life (59–60). Landy argues that this reductionism is a mere dogmatic point of view, compared with which Socrates's openness to the superiority of morality and reason appears to be a much more daring and open-minded perspective. This idea of a skeptical openness to a superior principle is fundamental to Landy's reading of Plato.

The interpretation of Plato proposed in the fourth chapter is one of what one could call "soft metaphysics." In general, Straussian readings of Plato describe the famous "Socratic turn" as a noncosmological foundation of political philosophy, stressing, in the *Apology*, Socrates's profession of ignorance concerning the suprahuman and his claim of a mere human wisdom, that is, a wisdom of human affairs or political wisdom.<sup>3</sup> Landy's interpretation is much different because it insists—beyond Socratic knowledge of ignorance—on the reasons why Socrates departed from pre-Socratic cosmology, that is, its mechanical and materialistic reductionism (75–76) which parallels the reductionism of modern natural sciences regarding the possibility of a telic principle. Hence Socrates's second sailing described in the *Phaedo* "evidently seeks to understand the good as a cosmic principle through a study of human speeches and of the ideas to which the speeches seem to point" (77). Landy thus describes Platonic metaphysics as the Socratic openness to the mysterious character of the ordered cosmos, of the Ideas, and of the human soul that is oriented toward them—a mystery that is sufficiently important to entertain a reasonable openness to the immortality of the soul and to the existence of God or of a telic principle of the universe of some kind (79).

At first glance, this perspective is not very different from Strauss's description of the Socratic turn away from pre-Socratic, specific cosmologies to an understanding of human being in the light of the mysterious character of the whole. But for Strauss, the Platonic Ideas that constitute the heterogeneity of the whole are to be understood as the fundamental and permanent problems or questions.<sup>4</sup> Landy correctly observes that if the Ideas are interpreted in terms of questions, they cannot stand by themselves, independently from the

<sup>3</sup> Leo Strauss, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 40–42. See for example Terence Marshall, "Leo Strauss et la question des Anciens et des Modernes," *Cahiers de philosophie juridique et politique*, no. 23 (1993): 59–60.

<sup>4</sup> Leo Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 38–39.

human soul (78), and that this independency was problematic for Strauss, perhaps because he thought it “might open the door to a renewed theological interpretation” of Plato, an interpretation contrary to his “desire to keep philosophy and theology apart” (66–67). According to Landy, Strauss’s non-theological interpretation of the Ideas is problematic for two reasons.

First, it undermines Strauss’s defense of the philosophical life as the *best* way of life or as the *one* thing needful. Surely, Strauss developed what we could call the skeptical or zetetic argument for the defense of philosophy: given that we do not know what the best way of life is, it is urgent to ask ourselves what it is and hence, we should philosophize (72). Landy is right to say that such a provisional need for philosophy is by no mean the establishment of philosophy as *the* solution to the problem of the good life. Insofar as the Ideas are questions and insofar as these problems do not provide answers by themselves, we can *never be completely sure* that philosophy is the best way of life. I think that Strauss was fully aware of this. I think that his claim for the superiority of the theoretical life was skeptical rather than dogmatic, and that this is why he kept saying that the theological-political problem, the conflict between Athens and Jerusalem, was *the* problem of the human life. But I think that his zetetic defense of the philosophical life is slightly different, and, perhaps, stronger: given that philosophy is based on the knowledge of one’s ignorance, it is “nothing but genuine awareness of the fundamental and comprehensive problems.” Hence, since there “is no wisdom but only quest for wisdom” it is impossible to find an alternative to philosophy without falling into “subjective certainty” or belief.<sup>5</sup> If for Landy the mystery of the whole indicates some directions for the answers, for Strauss it merely leads us to a serious awareness of the questions.

Second, Landy notes that if the Ideas are solely questions immanent to human nature, they can hardly help to find the content of a theory of natural right. In other words, what happens to justice and the good if the Ideas with which we are supposed to measure them are mere questions? One may say that Landy cannot help but face the same problem: even if the Ideas are independent transcendent entities, they are strictly formal principles devoid of any content for human virtues. In other words, even if he refuses to accept that the Ideas are the permanent questions, he does not provide us with answers. Landy argues that Strauss, facing this problem of the content of morality, rooted virtue not in natural right but in a dual system of

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<sup>5</sup> Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny*, rev. ed., ed. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 196.

two sources of morality wherein the moral virtues are ultimately reducible either to the needs of the body (the virtues of the citizens assuring a political unity, stability, and prosperity) or to the needs of the mind (as it requires a stable and prosperous city) (70–71). Although I think that these two roots are not alien to Strauss’s conception of natural right, Landy is right to say that this perspective is dualistic: it implies a dualism between philosophers and nonphilosophers, between theory and practice, and ultimately, between the mind and the body. These dualisms can find a solution only if one of the terms is said to be superior. For both Plato and Strauss, the superiority goes to the theoretical life, to the life of the mind. Landy refuses this dualism.

Chapter 5, “The Limitations of Platonic Dualism,” presents Aristotle’s critique of Plato and different modern responses to Platonic dualism—which goes along with a severe political pessimism—from Machiavelli to Adam Smith and Marx. It seems that Landy’s move beyond Platonic dualism proposes to bridge the gap between the ancients and the moderns. His suggestion is that a modern understanding of nature must combine with an ancient understanding of the human soul in order to deepen and solidify the foundations of modern political liberalism (135).

This program of what Landy calls a “Socratic liberalism” is explained as follows in chapter 6: “Taking Aquinas’s theory of natural law with a dose of Socratic scepticism, we thus affirm the liberal principles of freedom and toleration, respecting the liberty of each individual to pursue happiness as each sees fit, within certain limits recognized as well by modern liberal theory” (139). The main difference, I believe, between Landy’s Socratic liberalism and, for instance, Smith’s reading of Strauss’s “Platonic liberalism” is that the latter is more attached to the open-minded character of liberalism, which opens the possibility of philosophy and hence of a universal aristocracy through education,<sup>6</sup> while the former, with the help of Aquinas, seeks an actual realization of the mixed regime and sees it in an Aristotelian perspective on American constitutionalism. Landy’s proposition reminds one of the Aristotelianizing of America of the so-called “West Coast Straussians” like Harry Jaffa,<sup>7</sup> to which he refers at the end of his chapter (170).

The concluding chapter is an attempt at a resolution of the Straussian opposition between philosophy and poetry. If Strauss understood Plato’s solution of this quarrel as a submission of poetry to philosophical purposes—a

<sup>6</sup> Smith, *Reading Leo Strauss*, 104–7.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Zuckert and Zuckert, *Truth about Leo Strauss*, 217–27, 239–52.

solution embodied in the form of the Platonic dialogues—Landy is uncomfortable with this hierarchy that presupposes a dualism. He appeals to the complementarity of philosophical and poetic wisdom. Transposing these wisdoms to the two opposite seductions to which Strauss refers in “What Is Political Philosophy?”—the charm of competence and mathematics and the humble charm of the meditation on the human soul<sup>8</sup>—Landy affirms that Plato’s philosophical purpose was not to avoid both of these temptations but to embrace them together. To say the least, it is not at all certain that meditation on the human soul is an unfit category for “philosophical wisdom.” It is just as uncertain that this proposition of a “new” equilibrium between these two poles does not imply a hierarchy. It is thus uncertain that it is more than a rhetorical attempt to veil the dual opposition that it presupposes.

If Landy’s book proposes a post-Straussian task of debunking Straussian dualisms in favor of syntheses or reconciliations, it shows at the same time that as long as Strauss’s dualist thinking is taken seriously, one is not so easily rid of it.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 40.

<sup>9</sup> This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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Barry Craig and Sara MacDonald, *Recollecting Dante's Divine Comedy in the Novels of Mark Helprin: The Love That Moves the Sun and the Other Stars*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014, xxvi + 139 pp., \$80.00 (hardcover).

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## Love Wins

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In their meditation on some of the novels of contemporary author, speech-writer, and political analyst Mark Helprin, for whom such serious treatment is overdue, Barry Craig and Sara MacDonald show how Dantean themes permeate the four novels they discuss. Their main focus and, as they argue, Helprin's, is love. *Recollecting* is organized by adopting the structure of the *Divine Comedy*, with chapters on Helprin's *A Soldier in the Great War* loosely corresponding to *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, *In Sunlight and in Shadow* to *Purgatorio*, and *A Winter's Tale* to *Paradiso*. A concluding chapter on *Freddy and Fredericka* concludes the book with a discussion of what Craig and MacDonald present as a distinctly liberal, quasi-Hegelian aspect of Helprin's political philosophy.

What Helprin draws from Dante, our authors show, is a sense of the power of love in all its forms, but particularly the cosmic or eschatological power of love that is properly ordered within a Providential whole that is not in all respects comprehensible to us. Thus, *A Soldier in the Great War* is about the life of Alessandro Giuliani, a man of aesthetic temperament who makes his way though World War I as he fights his own great war: "the struggle all individuals of a finite order face" in the modern world to find "the ground of ethical life themselves" in light of their own mortality (5). Our authors

believe that while this task is very difficult, Helprin and Dante share the view that “the finite order of physical and inferior beings is...the means by which one learns to love and will the infinite” (8). Hence “an individual life has such integrity that, in reflecting on it, the nature of the divine and the basis for all human happiness can be sufficiently, if not fully, revealed” (6). Such reflection requires seeing how finitude points beyond itself, for taken only on its own terms it seems to present us with a life governed by fate, chance, and the various kinds of corruption that precede the ultimate corruption of death. Just as Dante descends into Hell, so Alessandro’s engagement in finitude presents him with the constant temptation to descend morally, and (as Craig and MacDonald believe Dante portrays as true in *Inferno* generally) to be trapped in finitude by his own vices (4).

The specific root of his vice is “a disordering of his loves, such that the finite and particular world takes precedence over and against the universal and infinite. Alessandro fears that the particular people he loves will be lost and does not believe that they might be saved in and by the absolute” (30). At the very end of his life, Alessandro realizes that he has lived a life “too much clouded by fear and too little enlivened by faith and trust” in the possibility that his great love for those he has lost may point beyond itself (34). As he is dying, it seems that he revives a hope he had encouraged when his father, close to death himself, expresses the wish that God would grant him reunion with his loved ones, allowing him to be at the same time “a child for the sake of my father, and a father for the sake of my children.” So like Dante (and unlike the souls eternally trapped in Hell) there is the possibility that Alessandro has descended in order to ascend, that properly ordered and understood, his worldly loves point him to a transcendent love.

Alessandro’s dying intuition about the meaning of love is given a chance to develop in *In Sunlight and in Shadow*, a post-World War II love story that Craig and MacDonald draw into the orbit of *Purgatorio*. Their task at this stage is complicated by the fact that “as is generally the case in Helprin’s novels, God is seldom referenced directly or at length. Instead, the divine is represented via eternal attributes: beauty, love, justice, and so on” (62). We probably should not assume it is a small step from such eternal attributes to a full-blown Providential order, yet as our authors show, at the very least it is a step that the protagonists of *In Sunlight and in Shadow* could take. Hence, like those in purgatory, whose sins, Craig and MacDonald suggest, are not so very different from those in Hell, Catherine Hale and Harry Copeland have “faith and hope that that the divine will overcome their deficiencies such that

they might be reconciled to God” (39). They also are willing to do the “hard work” that such a reconciliation will require (40).

Catherine is a musical theater actress who has been raised as a blue-blooded New England Episcopalian, although (spoiler alert) it turns out that she is Jewish by the law of matrilineal descent. Harry is a Jewish New Yorker trying to run his father’s high-end leather goods business in the face of efforts by the mob to put him out of business. When they meet, not, as things turn out, quite for the first time, Harry has recently returned from a difficult war on the European front, and their immediate attraction brings Catherine to leave a wealthy, “appropriate” fiancé who has been sexually abusing her since childhood—a defection which prompts the spurned lover to make systematic efforts to ruin her acting career.

Harry and Catherine (like Dante) have each escaped a kind of hell, and together must struggle against many forces that would drive them apart or otherwise compromise their love—including an opportunity to move to California and start over under easier circumstances. Craig and MacDonald point out that neither is perfect; Harry had to do some tough things in the war, and is slow to take up the legacy of his father’s business, Catherine too willing to accept her abusive relationship for the sake of the conventionalities (49). They are a noble and beautiful couple, facing life with passion, intelligence, and resolution—so much so that even a sympathetic reader might at times find their deeds and speeches a bit over the top. Our authors claim that we see them active in the world in such a way as to suggest that while the finite world is in and of itself “not a proper end, it is nonetheless a sufficient means for indicating the nature of this end and mediating one’s desire for it” (64). Therefore they can seek to order their love in light of both such redemptive possibilities that are available in the finite world and, ultimately, the divine grace that transcends it.

If Craig and MacDonald are correct on this point, it still has to be said that Helprin is a little vague about just how the story line reflects a growing appreciation of the Providential nature of Catherine and Harry’s love, or how that awareness reveals itself in the shape of their lives. Realizing her Jewishness, for example, forces Catherine “to reflect on the limitations of her natural existence,” to become open to a “ceaseless aspiration and struggle for justice on earth” (52). Practically speaking that does not mean that Catherine gets Harry to do something so prosaic as joining a synagogue; it seems to contribute to her strength to persist in her acting career and to her willingness to see her husband risk his life to save his company. For ultimately Harry seeks

justice in the world—if going outside the law to protect his business from the mob is justice—by mounting a successful paramilitary operation against his oppressor, in the course of which he is fatally wounded. So in the end Craig and MacDonald have to admit the novel only *points* to “transcendence and redemption.” Harry’s death, leaving Catherine pregnant, is “unsatisfying” but we are given to think “by the merest of signs” that the reunion of these lovers is “only postponed, not denied” (73).

We must turn from the romance of *In Sunlight and in Shadow* to the magical realism of Helprin’s much earlier *Winter’s Tale* to see a more full-blown picture of “redemption beyond the limits of the finite order” (77). The analysis of this rich book, a high point of Helprin’s authorial career, is also a high point of Craig and MacDonald’s book. As a consequence, this story of the fall and rise of New York City and of thief/mechanic Peter Lake, along with our authors’ analysis of it, defies easy summary. Helprin’s themes are the quest for a just city and the recovery of lost love, and Craig and MacDonald show how he weaves them together in light of Dante’s teaching in *Paradiso* about the limits of the unity possible within the earthly city, where particularity must stand to some degree in opposition to universality. But “if the transcendent finds the natural order sufficient for its manifestation” (98), we can understand our desire for a greater justice as pointing out of our limitedness towards a higher synthesis: to love equally and without tension family and friends and the wider human collectivity of the city. While the authors hold that Helprin’s “restoration of nature” is “more complete” than Dante would allow (109), this much can be said of both: “The justice of heaven is not achieved by overcoming or erasing the diversity of the particular world. Instead, the particular natures of these souls are reconciled to the universal, while still retaining those characteristics that make them individuals...each individual being brought to the distinct and perfect form of him or herself” (80). *Winter’s Tale* hints at how this reconciliation in turn means that “the choices that are made in time have eternal effect” (83), all the more so because “one’s finite experience of time is caused by a limitation in one’s perspective” (82).

The victories of love in the *Divine Comedy* and in the first three novels discussed here are predicated on “the human freedom that makes true moral action possible” (110). In this connection, Helprin must confront a modern understanding of freedom as subjectivity that goes well beyond anything that Dante would have been familiar with (110), for example, love as pure subjective feeling as it has been enshrined by the Supreme Court. Dante and Helprin attempt to do justice, as we have seen, to such claims of subjectivity

as are ultimately consistent with eternal absolutes. But such justice for Helprin as for Dante is ultimately beyond nature, and when it descends upon the world as in *Winter's Tale*, the consequences are apocalyptic. In their final chapter, on Helprin's satirical *Freddy and Fredericka*, Craig and MacDonald keep love as their focus, but turn from divine comedy to the ship of fools, examining what Helprin has to say about the possibility of worldly justice within the framework of contemporary American democratic politics.

Freddy and Fredericka are a royal pair highly reminiscent of Charles and Diana. They are exiled without resources to the United States, where they make their way up the socioeconomic ladder, learning along the way about "the life of a free people whose merit is dependent on what they make of themselves and not on any institutional or natural hierarchy" (121). Their experiences teach them that "a political community that does not see the essential autonomy and worth of an individual human being...is tyrannical and unjust" (118). It is unjust because the political community does not value the particular abilities of each member, and each individual is not encouraged to express his freedom by making consequential decisions about how to lead a good life given that particularity. And yet autonomy cannot be understood as predicated on isolated, anomic beings. "Helprin's examples suggest that by means of love, individuals might understand how best to actualize their freedom, desiring not just their own good, but also the good of the whole" (117). Freddy comes to understand Lincoln in terms of "love that is ever awaiting." He "sacrificed himself for the sake of the freedom of others, thereby actualizing his own freedom to the fullest degree" (121). Thus through Lincoln democratic freedom can teach Freddy and Fredericka the true meaning of nobility, and as they learn to value properly their fellow men, each learns to appreciate and love the abilities of the other.

That "justice requires love and love requires freedom" (125) is something Dante and Helprin could agree upon, Craig and MacDonald suggest. But they argue that Helprin adds a Hegelian premise that a modern political regime such as the United States can unify subjectivity and objectivity. Our regime is built on "the objective recognition...of human freedom as the foundation of political society" such that individuals "in pursuit of their subjective ends are not opposed to the good of the regime but central to its very purpose." As Helprin sees it, even so citizens need to be "prepared to sacrifice their subjective interests either for the good of particular people or the good of the whole" (125).

Throughout their book, our authors present a carefully nuanced view of the relationship between Dante and Helprin. Craig and MacDonald plainly share a great love of *The Divine Comedy*, and they are sensitive interpreters of this rich and difficult text. Having learned most of what I know about Dante from Father Ernest Fortin many years ago, I was happy to see how our authors realize, even if they do not stress it as much as Fortin did, that Dante's Catholicism is not entirely orthodox. More to the point, they understand that Helprin is himself not an orthodox Dantean, whatever that might turn out to mean. In short, that they are careful not to shoehorn either thinker into pre-established categories is one of the great strengths of this book. As a result the likenesses between the novels they discuss and the *Divine Comedy* emerge gently and thematically rather than by finding neat correspondences; they do not mine Helprin for supposed proof-texts. As convincing as the argument is, then, on its own terms, the book does not preclude other interpretive possibilities; indeed, by showing Helprin deserves to be taken very seriously as a novelist with a moral purpose, it opens the door to them.

For example, Craig and MacDonald are sensitive to the fact that Helprin is a Jewish writer, and at various moments connect his thinking with Jewish themes. But the Dantean framework of their analysis, however deftly applied, requires giving priority to a Catholic interpretation of his work. (They have a private communication from Helprin suggesting that he has a long-standing interest in the reconciliation of Jewish and Christian traditions [73].) Helprin's love of Dante seems well documented, and certainly from the character of much of his work thus far it looks like Helprin has not aspired to be a "Jewish novelist" in the mold of a Mordecai Richler, Philip Roth, or Saul Bellow. Still, he is plainly not uninterested in things Jewish, so a further look for Jewish elements in Helprin's thinking would not be amiss, if only in the name of a more complete reconciliation. Indeed, it is not hard, following up on the themes our authors highlight, to find powerful Jewish antecedents.

For example, the theme of descending in order to ascend we saw in *A Soldier in the Great War* is suggested already in Proverbs: "a just man falls seven times, and rises up again" (24:16). The twentieth-century rabbi Yitzhak Hunter, commenting on this passage, notes, "the knowledgeable are aware that the essence of the righteous man's rising again is *because* of his seven falls." There are intimations of this theme in the Talmud (Nedarim 55a: "Once a person renders himself like a wilderness, deserted before all, the Torah is given to him as a gift") and it becomes an ongoing theme of Jewish mysticism and Chasidism of both the Chabad ("Because this is the way the world was

designed: Any descent always results, eventually, in an ascent”) and Breslov varieties, where a great many of the stories told of Rabbi Nachman’s early life suggest how he used the momentum of his failures to reach ever greater spiritual heights.

The proper ordering of erotic desire is likewise a theme with deep Jewish roots, although it is usually framed by a discussion of the *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination, which (like *eros*) includes but is not exhausted by sexuality. In a famous midrashic interpretation of the statement in Genesis that God’s creation taken as a whole is “very good,” the evil inclination is said to be part of what makes the world very good, for without it “a person would not build a house, would not take a wife, would not beget, would not conduct business” (Midrash Rabbah Genesis 9:7). In Jewish law, all of these worldly activities (Harry and Catherine engage in three of the four) are the subject of several of the 613 *mitzvot* or commandments; following them elevates the individual and the world towards perfection. Thus in Judaism does the finite point beyond itself.

Speaking more broadly, we can explore through Helprin a moral world consistent with some major trends in Jewish mysticism. There is an important link between *In Sunlight and in Shadow*, Helprin’s latest novel, and the much earlier *Winter’s Tale*, where the title image of the newer book appears five times. For example:

At every turn the city [New York] presents scenes of triumph and scenes of dejection. It is a kaleidoscope of sunshine and shadow that represents our condition far better than the wheel of fortune, for the wheel of fortune, though correctly polar, does not allow the proper fragmentation of time and events. The perfect simplicity of salvation is broken up upon these rocks that we have built, and scattered for us to ponder and piece together in a test that tries our patience and understanding. We learn that justice may not always follow a just act, that justice can sleep for years and awaken when it is least expected, that a miracle is nothing more than dormant justice from another time arriving to compensate those it has cruelly abandoned. Whoever knows this is willing to suffer for he knows that nothing is in vain.

Why is a kaleidoscope of sunshine and shadow a better way to think about the human moral condition than Fortuna’s wheel? When we think of a wheel we may well imagine smooth and continuous motion from one position to another. But our moral world is more mixed up; sunshine and shadow suggest that the polarities are more like two sides of the same coin than opposites on a wheel.

How so? The first act of creation we hear of in Genesis is God's separation of darkness and light; shadows are one ongoing manifestation of that act, a necessary feature of a material world illuminated by light, by energy. You can't have the light of the sun without shadow in the material world as we know it (but compare Zechariah 14:6–7). To extend the image to what is likely to be the furthest reach of its metaphorical meaning, the world is constantly suffused by the effulgence of the Divine light, but as that energy proceeds "downward" into the world we know it must be constricted in order not to overwhelm our limited materiality. That restriction presents, even requires, shadows—the possibility of what we call evil, and what is genuinely evil. The shadows are a consequence of the very materiality that is the only way that in this world we can encounter the Divine.

The shadow, the "dark side" of materiality, is ultimately an expression of the sunlight. One might even say it is one way in which the light becomes more present to us, showing itself by contrast with darkness. Shadows exist by nature, but human beings build new things that cast their own shadows. The city, as an expression of the quest for justice, could be thought of as the highest expression of human-created materiality. The arrangement of bodies in the city, of material beings, is over time dynamic, producing ever-shifting configurations of sunlight and shadow, in some ways predictable, in some ways not, as the days and months pass and people pursue their multitudes of activities. All of this activity may be ultimately law governed in some fashion, but not necessarily in a fashion we are likely to comprehend immediately. Sunlight and shadow suggest the moral complexity of this world without eliminating the ultimate polarity between justice and injustice.

Helprin seems to believe (with Flannery O'Connor) that on those occasions when the light of the good breaks through and the world is less restricted by shadow, it descends more like a screaming eagle than a dove of peace. (The cover story the 1956 Yankees give their came-out-of-nowhere yeshiva-student prodigy in Helprin's comic short story "Perfection" is that he once played for the Milledgeville Crab Legs.) The moment of the just city in *Winter's Tale* follows nighttime scenes of New York burning—just the opposite of what one might expect. But justice is not pretty; it does not necessarily correspond to our disordered desires. As a character in *Winter's Tale* says, "Who said that justice is what you imagine? Can you be sure that you know it when you see it, that you will live long enough to recognize the decisive thunder of its occurrence, that it can be manifest within a generation, within ten generations, within the entire span of human existence? What you are

talking about is common sense, not justice. Justice is higher and not as easy to understand—until it presents itself in unmistakable splendor. The design of which I speak is far above our understanding. But we can sometimes feel its presence.” The light of real justice is perhaps so bright it overwhelms our sight and leaves us in all but darkness; terrible events, suggests the Lubavicher Rebbe, are blessings so great that they are beyond our comprehension.

How much of this Jewish material Helprin is aware of or interested in I do not know. I imagine that he would look for any reconciliation of Jewish and Christian traditions on terms of equality, in the sense at least of each having an equal chance to be reconciled with the truth. In either case, Craig and MacDonald leave us with the possibility that serious moral reflection suggests how the world opens itself to a properly ordered love, “love strong as death” (Song of Songs 8:6).



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Peter Augustine Lawler, *Modern and American Dignity: Who We Are as Persons, and What That Means for Our Future*. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2010, 288 pp., \$26.95 (hardcover).

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Seventy years ago the Jesuit theologian Henri de Lubac wrote a book titled *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (*Le drame de l'humanisme athée*). The “drama” of the title is derived from a question: Will the antitheistic writers of the recent past succeed in turning Europeans away from Christian theism—and if they do, what will the consequences be? Lawler’s book might well have been titled *The Drama of Dignity*. But the elements in this drama require some sorting out.

*Modern and American Dignity* is a collection of twelve “closely related essays” (1). All were previously published, as articles or reviews in journals or as book chapters. Their diverse origins make for a somewhat heterogeneous collection. Dignity is an explicit theme of the first four essays, identified as such in their titles. It is an implicit theme in the others, inasmuch as they address the question of “who we are as persons” and what being persons, or persons of a certain kind, implies about human significance. Several of the essays do this by commenting, at times very loosely, on the work of others to whom Lawler acknowledges a special debt: Chantal Delsol, Alexis de Tocqueville, Joseph Ratzinger, John Courtney Murray, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

The terms vary somewhat from chapter to chapter, but there is a broad consistency in Lawler’s descriptions of the principal historical views of human dignity. The classical view is passed over rather quickly, presumably because he regards it as unsatisfactory in having no place for persons or a personal

God (though he seems to exempt the Platonic Socrates from this judgment [207–16]). The Christian view of dignity remedies this defect by accounting for the irreplaceable uniqueness of each human being. Christians, in fact, invented or discovered what we now call *liberalism* (230–31). The *modern* liberal view finds the source of human beings' dignity in our unique ability to use what nature has given us to secure ourselves against the indifference or hostility of nature—in short, in our productivity. Finally, the Kantian view identifies human dignity with the autonomy of beings who live by laws they give to themselves. Though these views are distinct in principle, in practice they resolve themselves into a smaller number of alternatives.

The views that associate dignity with productivity on one hand and with autonomy on the other agree in holding that “God and nature—and even community and tradition—can provide no authoritative guidance for who we are.” Our colleges, to which Americans once looked for help in interpreting God and nature, now offer no real alternative to productivity and autonomy as the “dominant understandings of freedom and dignity in our technological society.” Their graduates, sophisticated “bourgeois bohemians” (Lawler borrows this term from the journalist David Brooks), easily “take pride in both their productivity and their autonomy” without any consciousness of a contradiction (52–54). Their outlook is variously described as individualist or libertarian.

Then there is the view that regards *all* notions of human dignity as radically unscientific and hence false. Human beings, according to the Darwinian view, are different in degree from other animals but not different in kind. But in practice, again, “sophisticated Americans who pride themselves on being whole-hog Darwinians speak incessantly about the freedom and dignity of the individual” (139). Our attachment to the idea of dignity seems to increase as the scientific basis for it falls away.

In truth, as Lawler argues convincingly, the libertarian or individualist and Darwinian outlooks go wrong in opposite directions. The first takes too little account of nature and community, the second too much. The best evidence that human beings should not be viewed simply as a part of nature is the fact that we are discontented with what nature provides—with the weakness and neediness of our bodies. But the same weakness and neediness also serves to remind us of our dignity as members of families, political communities, and churches, with obligations to parents, children, spouses, neighbors, and fellow citizens. The Christian view of dignity, or perhaps a uniquely American hybrid of modern and Christian liberalism, yields the

most satisfactory account of the persons we know ourselves to be. Yet there is no doubt that the libertarian or individualist view exerts a powerful appeal. It points, in fact, in the direction of transhumanism—the effort to overcome the limits of our nature in the name of freedom. Americans are more free and secure than ever, but also more miserable and “death-haunted.” The good news, according to Lawler, is that human nature will resist any final degradation along the lines of the society described in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*. The drama will continue.

In an intellectual environment that discourages engagement with big questions and even sneers at them, Lawler’s work is refreshing. At the same time, one can’t help wishing that his questions were bigger, or at least clearer. While Lawler is bold and illuminating about the particular human beings that share our modern world, he is cautious about human beings in general. In another book, let us hope, he will give us the comprehensive account of human life and nature that this collection of essays seems to promise.



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Robert Howse, *Leo Strauss: Man of Peace*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 202 pp., \$34.99 (paperback).

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## Man of Thought

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There are many different paths and ways of overcoming—look *you* to them! But only a jester thinks: “The human can also be *overjumped*.”

—Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

Declaring the banal truth that Leo Strauss was a controversial figure is by now nearly a convention in any exegesis of his work. Yet when we discuss his divisive impact on political theory and politics we reveal a great deal regarding how we understand these ways of life, even as we attempt to descry the ripples and riddles of his writings. On one hand, Strauss’s impact on the world of *politics* has been the subject of an absurd war of letters. He has been linked indirectly to the “neoconservative” Bush administration and the second Gulf War. On the other hand, the nature of his *thinking* was quietly controversial before it ever became linked to neoimperial warfare by irresponsible scholarship and amateurish reportage. What wild thoughts could precipitate the invasion of a Middle Eastern tyranny and whip academic

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The author would like to thank Eli Friedland and Cameron Cotton-O’Brien for reading and thinking about Professor Howse’s provocative and challenging book with me.

liberals into such a frenzy of prejudice? Robert Howse's intriguing new book *Leo Strauss: Man of Peace* offers an interpretation of Strauss's thinking that seeks to wash it clean of the accusation that it had anything philosophically in common with the neoimperial thinking that led to the war in Iraq. In offering such an interpretation Howse sheds light on Strauss's understanding of the relationship between politics and philosophy. Howse's central thesis is that Strauss's work formed a kind of *t'shuvah* or repentance for his youthful attraction to what he called the "German Nihilism" present in the work of writers such as Martin Heidegger, Ernst Jünger, and Carl Schmitt. According to Howse, Strauss's movement away from such writers entailed a kind of *religious* commitment to *philosophically* engage with the great thinkers of the early modern and classical past. In the course of outlining this path, Howse claims that it eventually led Strauss not to a crass realism disdainful of the pursuit of international comity, but to a Thucydidean distrust of "progress" as an ideal that can permanently wrest war from peace. Howse traces the path of Strauss's *t'shuvah* through his personal letters, his early engagement and critique of Carl Schmitt, the dialogue he carried out with Alexandre Kojève concerning Xenophon's *Hiero*, his writings on Machiavelli and Thucydides, and finally his lectures on Kant and Hugo Grotius. In each of these contexts Howse claims to demonstrate that "through his experiment with a new kind of philosophizing, the construction of intertemporal dialogues with and among thinkers of the past, Strauss sought to align radical philosophical questioning, no-holds-barred debate over the right answers to the fundamental questions, with responsible, moderate politics" (178). While Howse's Strauss may not subscribe to liberal internationalism, neither is he a creature of the neoconservative right. Like the veteran Socrates, he is said to be a "man of peace" rather than a warmonger or pacifist. The book concludes with a critique of Strauss's philosophical radicalism and political moderation, drawn from Strauss's own critique of Nietzsche, along with a call for the engagement of "open-minded people" with the "philosophical modesty" of Strauss's work.

This book will be widely read, despised, and loved, and not in any particular order. Howse's work makes several very valuable contributions to understanding Strauss's thought, in particular by shutting down those polemicists who would accuse Strauss of a secret admiration for fascism and raising the question of Strauss's view of international law in the context of his lectures on Kant and Grotius. However, there are also several critical problems with the book. The central claim Howse makes, that Strauss's work can be traced as a path of spiritual atonement for his early attraction to

nihilism and fascism, is split between polemical and philosophical concerns. Howse unfortunately allows his polemical concern to cleanse Strauss from his reputation among liberals to pollute his philosophical inquiry into the nature of Strauss's thought regarding the relationship between philosophy, politics, and violence.

## I

The first example of this pollution is Howse's distracting polemic against the contemporary "Straussian cult." In an attempt to defend Strauss against his admirers Howse opens his book with an attack on "Straussianism," which has apparently increasingly been composed of "noisy right-wing public intellectuals like Harvey Mansfield, William Kristol, and the late Allan Bloom, for whom Strauss is a kind of mascot or warhorse of conservative *Kulturkampf*" (4). It is not clear what this ad hominem vitriol has to do with the task Howse sets himself in his book. He quickly makes the disclaimers that "I do not want to disparage individual scholars who are Straussians" and that "my concern with the *collective* behavior of Straussians as opposed to their individual merits as scholars is not about descending into petty academic politics" (4–5). Yet this naming of names, dripping with disdain as it is, seems to perform exactly what Howse supposedly derides, that is, "scoring polemical victories to the cheering of one's own followers" (6). The only explanation for this polemical diversion in terms of Howse's project is that such bad "Straussianism" has made "open minded engagement with Strauss's work by the mainstream academy almost impossible" (5). Perhaps there is some truth to this statement, but the evidence Howse provides is that

the notion of superiority or even election does make Straussians different from the other intellectual cults: for instance, I have known many students and followers of Habermas who argue vigorously for his approach to democracy and social critique, but I have yet to encounter a single one who viewed her or himself as personally superior by virtue of following Habermas as opposed, say, to Dworkin, Rawls, or Derrida. (5)

Some readers will readily agree with Howse's account of academia's "cults." I suspect that many readers, especially those who think that Rawls, Habermas, and Dworkin are fairly similar in the substance and method of their thought not to mention in their engagement with writers lying outside of their tradition, will find this evidence absurd. Isn't part of Howse's project to pierce the attitude of *prejudice* demonstrated by students of Rawls, Habermas, Dworkin, and Derrida towards Strauss? In that case they wouldn't be such paragons of

philosophical “open-mindedness” after all. More importantly, what it is that makes “Straussianism” create such apparently nasty and conceited scholars is never explained. If “Straussianism” is an ideological corruption of Strauss then it would be helpful for Howse to point out where the *bad* “Straussians” come from; where exactly they misread or ignore Strauss. The problem of the bad “Straussians” is never explained or linked to Howse’s own interesting interpretive project, except possibly in a telling critique of Strauss offered in the conclusion. I will return to this concluding critique once I have surveyed some further difficulties and virtues of Howse’s account of Strauss’s *t’shuvah*.

The question of Strauss’s reception and legacy regularly interferes with the central thesis of the book, even at its most crucial and interesting moments. Howse thinks that Strauss’s *t’shuvah* or atonement for his early attraction to nihilism “is accomplished not through pious shame or remorse but through an even greater philosophical *Redlichkeit*” (16). Yet Howse is distracted from demonstrating what exactly this philosophical atonement entailed by the need to disentangle Strauss from the distortions of writers such as Anne Norton and Stephen Holmes. Holmes and Norton disapprovingly read Strauss as going *further* than the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt, the theorist of the “exception,” in favoring war without limits and an antiliberal politics.

Howse helpfully demonstrates that Holmes and Norton are certainly mistaken in reading Strauss as a kind of politically radical hawk or fascist, and he does this by unfolding his own narrative of Strauss’s intellectual development as a kind of radical philosophical atonement. Where Norton and Holmes read Strauss’s critique of Schmitt as a radicalization of Schmitt’s own thinking regarding the relationship of war to morality, Howse treats this early critique of Schmitt as one step on a path Strauss took away from such nihilistic thinking, towards the recovery of a modern humanism untainted by the nihilism-inducing answers of modern philosophy. He claims that the first evidence for Strauss’s early attraction to nihilism is his statement to Karl Löwith that Friedrich Nietzsche “so dominated and bewitched me between my 22nd and 30th year, that I literally believed everything I understood of him” (14). As proof of Strauss’s turn away from Nietzsche’s nihilism, Howse offers a reading of Strauss’s critique of Schmitt, a controversial letter to Löwith regarding Nazi Germany, and his wartime lecture “German Nihilism.” Against Norton and Holmes, Howse reads Strauss as arguing in his “Notes on Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*” that at the heart of Schmitt’s commitment to “the political” as its own sphere of human existence characterized by the “friend-enemy distinction” lies Schmitt’s fear that the loss of

the political—the strife of friend-enemy conflict between groups—will constitute the withering of “the seriousness of human life” (43). Strauss thought that Schmitt affirmed the political against liberalism and the world-state for *moral* purposes, and thus could say that Schmitt’s “affirmation of the political as such proves to be a liberalism with the opposite polarity” (43). This critique by Strauss, accusing Schmitt the *Nazi jurist of liberalism* has been used by Norton, Holmes, and others to prove that Strauss was even more politically radical than Schmitt. Howse correctly reads Strauss’s notes on Schmitt as a *philosophical* radicalism on the part of Strauss, insofar as unlike Schmitt Strauss refused to be satisfied with brutal political answers to philosophical questions. Howse then explicates Strauss’s 1933 letter to Löwith, which has been thought of as the “smoking gun” proving Strauss’s credentials as a right-wing political radical. In the letter Strauss wrote that “only from the principles of the Right, fascist, authoritarian, *imperialist* principles can we oppose the abomination [*mesquine Unwesen*]....There is no reason to crawl to the cross, neither to the cross of liberalism, as long as somewhere in the world, there is a glimmer of the spark of Roman thought” (44–45). Howse very deftly shows how attempts to read this passage as an indication of Strauss’s secret fascism do not take into account contextual concerns such as German censorship, the proper non-anti-Semitic etymology of the word *mesquine*, and the clearly reasonable interpretation of the letter as a statement of Strauss’s view that successful resistance to Hitler had its best hope in the *non-Nazi* German Right. Finally, Howse situates this engagement with German thought as culminating in the lecture Strauss gave in 1941 on German nihilism. Just as Strauss accused Schmitt of affirming the strife of “the political” for *moral* reasons, so too did he understand the rejection by Germany’s philosophical youth of the choice between commitment to a peaceful communist world state and a desiccated tradition in favor of the military virtue of courage as “the only virtue left.” Howse reads Strauss’s understanding of the affirmation of courage as a moral answer to a godless world in spiritual decline as an *autobiographical* sympathy with the philosophical dilemma faced by German youth, coupled with a philosophical critique of the dilemma and its political solution.

According to Howse, this path from the political temptation of military courage in the midst of philosophical doubt regarding the moral seriousness of human life to the philosophical critique of that doubt as rooted in a false modern conception of philosophy is the initial arc of Strauss’s *t’shuvah*. Strauss understands that it is “out of love of morality in the first instance that the German nihilists are revolted by the apparent liberal or socialist utopia of ‘a world in which everyone would be happy and satisfied, a world in which

everyone would have his little pleasure by day and his little pleasure by night, a world in which no great heart could beat and no great soul could breathe” (29). Strauss defines this nihilism as the rejection of the principles of civilization, with the principles of civilization being understood as a “conscious culture of reason” unifying morals and science.<sup>1</sup> Its roots are philosophic in the rejection by past German thinkers of the self-interestedness and utilitarianism of modern English philosophy and theological in their atheistic acceptance of “the definitive and unquestionable *success* of the modern way of thinking in *refuting* God or the premises of pre-modern civilization more generally” (30). Strauss raised the counterfactual question of what kind of education would have been required for young Germans to resist the seduction of National Socialism, writing:

Those young men had come to doubt seriously, and not merely methodically or methodologically, the *principles* of modern civilization; the great authorities of that civilization did no longer impress them; it is evident that only those opponents would have been listened to who knew that doubt from their own experience, who from years of hard and independent thinking had overcome it.<sup>2</sup>

Howse cites this passage in the introduction of his book, claiming that “I believe the reference to ‘years of hard and independent thinking’ is autobiographical.... This is Strauss’s own struggle for a horizon beyond liberalism and anti-liberalism.... Strauss could plausibly say about *himself* that the answers he came to in rejecting the outlook of German nihilism were the result of working through his own initial attraction to it” (15). So how does Howse think Strauss “worked through” his initial attraction to such nihilism, and why does he identify the passage as autobiographical?

Howse’s answer regarding the *content* of Strauss’s atonement is that he radically questioned the philosophical understanding of modernity informing the young Germans’ historical self-understanding. This questioning resulted in a new direct engagement or “intertemporal dialogue” with the thinkers of the past and a political moderation itself rooted in the possibility of answers providing standards or principles of political action. Such philosophical dialogue with the questions and answers of the past disrupts the barren choice the young Germans faced between utopian communism and decisionist militarism. Why does Howse read the passage above as autobiographical? Howse never really offers a clear answer to this question, but

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Strauss, “German Nihilism,” *Interpretation* 26, no. 3 (1999): 366.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

the one direct link he offers is Strauss's youthful attraction to Nietzsche and Strauss's reading of Nietzsche as bearing some responsibility for German nihilism and Nazism. This link is as crucial for proving Howse's thesis as it is poorly developed. If Howse is correct, then Strauss understood Nietzsche as being in some measure responsible not only for creating the philosophical conditions for the nihilism of the young Germans, but also for *his own* attraction to nihilism. Yet later in the book, in a brief excursus meant to satisfy this line of questioning and address the scholarship of Laurence Lampert, Howse acknowledges that this is hardly how Strauss understood Nietzsche. For example, he writes:

Strauss viewed Nietzsche not merely or principally as a precursor of German nihilism; Strauss saw and emphasized that for Nietzsche, the highest form of the will to power is also the understanding of the truth, above all, the fundamental truth of the will to power itself. The willing of all the suffering that ever was and will be as intrinsically connected to all the greatness and splendor of whatever was and will be, is above all a form of self-overcoming. (122)

This acknowledgment by Howse casts his central thesis into doubt. How is it that Strauss overcame his attraction to Nietzsche's nihilism and the militarism it led to if he read Nietzsche *not* as a nihilist but as a *philosopher* who wills the truth? How did Strauss *overcome* German nihilism if Nietzsche is the philosophical father of such nihilism but not for Strauss, who instead read Nietzsche as a philosopher who thirsted for *truth*, *not*—as did the nihilists—for blind self-sacrifice?

Howse reads Strauss's comments on Nietzsche in his essay "What Is Political Philosophy?" as an indication that Strauss's problem with Nietzsche was not his thought but the careless presentation of that thought and Nietzsche's "eschewal of any empathy with common humanity" (122). The reader is left in the dark as to how Howse thinks Strauss "overcame" Nietzsche's thought. Does Strauss's comment regarding the problem with the *presentation* of Nietzsche's thought indicate that it was this irresponsible form of presentation that Strauss overcame rather than the content of Nietzsche's provocative thought? What is it about the doctrines of the will to power and eternal return that signify a lack of "empathy" with "common humanity" for Strauss? To be fair, Howse seems to take Strauss at his word when in his seminar on Xenophon he states "Nietzsche doesn't say anything which Machiavelli had not said before [although it was] stated by Machiavelli in more moderate terms" (90). Thus Howse seems to take his analysis of Strauss's overcoming of Machiavelli as equivalent to his overcoming of Nietzsche, but this seems

to me to be a hasty judgment or at least one in need of careful argument given Strauss's detailed discussion of Nietzsche in his "Note on the Plan of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*." This failure to adequately address Strauss's reading of Nietzsche demonstrates Howse's polemical distraction from his own thesis regarding Strauss's *t'shuvah*. He cuts into the polemical mistreatments of Strauss in explaining the distance between Schmitt and Strauss and Machiavelli, but he leaves unexplained the distance between Strauss and Nietzsche, even as his central claim is that the burgeoning of this distance constitutes an essential part of understanding the arc of Strauss's intellectual life. This omission is perhaps the true philosophical provocation of the book, as opposed to the more polemical provocation of its title.

## II

The omission of Nietzsche is accompanied by some skirting of the question of Strauss's thought regarding the relationship of religion to philosophy and politics. This is significant because Strauss's thought regarding the "theologico-political" problem was of profound importance in his intellectual development, not to mention again the fact that Howse characterizes Strauss's movement away from nihilism as a philosophical-cum-religious *t'shuvah*. There are many ways of interpreting Strauss's understanding of the "theologico-political" problem, but none are satisfactorily addressed and related to Howse's account of Strauss's intellectual development. Indeed, it would have been interesting for Howse to offer a reading of Strauss's 1946 letter to Löwith where Strauss writes of suffering a "ship wreck" inflicted by his growing need to confront the *factum brutum* of revelation.<sup>3</sup> Howse does not offer a direct linkage of Strauss's writings regarding the "theologico-political" problem to an account of his intellectual development. Instead, Howse explores Strauss's understanding of the "theologico-political" problem in his explication of Strauss's reading of Machiavelli and Thucydides and his seminars on Kant, Grotius, and international law.

Before delving into Howse's view of Strauss and the "theologico-political" problem it might be useful to review some of the main readings of Strauss regarding this issue. The following is a rough sketch of the various readings of Strauss's understanding of the "theologico-political" that is by no means

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<sup>3</sup> Leo Strauss to Löwith, August 15, 1946, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, ed. Heinrich Meier (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001), 663.

comprehensive. Michael Zuckert helpfully outlines Strauss's "apparent position" concerning the problem using three propositions:

- (1) To be a rationally defensible pursuit, philosophy must be able to refute revelation in a non-question-begging way.
- (2) Philosophy cannot refute revelation.
- (3) Philosophy is a rationally defensible pursuit.<sup>4</sup>

As the concluding proposition of Strauss's view contradicts the major and minor propositions, disagreements about how to interpret them divide readers of Strauss into four general schools of thought, all of which reject one proposition or another. The first school is *rationalist*. It reads Strauss as thinking that philosophy can indeed disprove the claims of revelation. The second school is *decisionist*. It comes in various forms and its proponents think that Strauss thought that philosophy could not refute revelation and "thus claim that Strauss arbitrarily or only exoterically decided for philosophy."<sup>5</sup> The third school is *zetetic*. This school reads Strauss as maintaining that the possibility of revelation could not be refuted by philosophy but that Strauss was committed to philosophy as a way of life without the necessary justification of that refutation. The fourth school is the *faith-based Straussians* who think that "Strauss's position on the relation between faith and reason opens the way for faith or even compels it."<sup>6</sup>

To which of these schools does Howse belong? In his analysis of Strauss's critique of Schmitt and Machiavelli Howse distances himself from the *decisionist* and *rationalist* readings of Strauss. Howse's discussion of Strauss's turn away from German nihilism includes an awareness that part of what Strauss rejected in the nihilist outlook was its *theological* roots in accepting modern philosophy's rejection of the existence of God. Thus Howse reads Strauss as rejecting the rationalist claim that *modern* philosophy can refute revelation and that commitments to proposition (2) are merely rhetorical in Strauss's oeuvre. Howse's characterization of Strauss's rejection of the nihilist choice between communist idealism and sacrificial militarism includes a defense of philosophy as a radical philosophical questioning of the modern theoretical premises, resulting in a politically moderating yet philosophical

<sup>4</sup> Michael Zuckert, "Straussians," in *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, ed. Steven Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 267.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

way of life. This would seem to preclude the *decisionist* rejection of position (3), that philosophy is a rationally defensible way of life.

It is less clear where Howse stands in relation to the *faith-based Straussians*. He is keen to declare Strauss's "anti-historicist" perspective "secular and immanent, not premised on a transcendent or religious view of human destiny," but he also reads Strauss's take on Thucydides as resulting in the possibility that "repentance ('return,' *t'shuvah*) coexists with and is equally part of the human experience as the temptation to transgression in the first place" (154, 143). Howse reads Strauss on Thucydides as understanding the famous speech of Diodotus that spares the Mytilenean *demos* from execution and enslavement as

an exceptional articulation of the essential humanity both of transgression and repentance, which points to a moderation inspired by a philosophical view of the human condition rather than one backed by piety or fear of the divine. The speech suggests the possibility that the specifically Jewish conception of *t'shuvah* has a root in an experience of humanity or the human condition that is, at a minimum, common to the Greek world as well that of revealed religion—and potentially universal. (139)

This understanding of Thucydides renders the religious concept of atonement or *t'shuvah* philosophical, which would not *compel* faith but perhaps render openness to it a part of the rational defense of philosophy. As Howse notes in the introduction to his book, for Strauss *t'shuvah* meant "return, meaning return from the wrong way to the right one," and he reads Strauss's return to the ancients as a return to the possibility of repentance that would seem to imply the possibility of a God formerly shut out by the philosophical mistakes of the German nihilists (16).

It is clear that Howse lies somewhere in the *faith-based* or *zetetic* camps of interpretation insofar as he questions the nature of Strauss's commitment to proposition (1) above, that is, the need for philosophy to refute revelation in order to be rationally defensible as way of life. If we accept Howse's reading of Strauss on Thucydides then proposition (1) becomes entirely questionable as *classical* philosophy turns out not to need to refute revelation but rather discovers the possibility of repentance or return as part of the human condition itself. This understanding of the "theologico-political" develops from Howse's explication of Strauss's opposition to the realist interpretation of Thucydides as reducing all political meaning to a kind of Schmittian power politics. Instead, for Howse Strauss not only reads but embraces Thucydides

as discovering the implication of redemption in “an immanent morality derived not deontologically but phenomenologically—from awareness that not only are the drives for survival, power, and gain visible in human experience almost everywhere and at all times, but so is the sense of restraint and awe; cruelty and severity are there but also compassion and gentleness” (143). At this point the reader is quite intrigued but could wish for Howse to comment further on the last lines of Strauss’s essay on Thucydides from *The City and Man* and relate them back to his account of Strauss’s intellectual development:

What is “first for us” is not the philosophical understanding of the city but the understanding which is inherent in the city as such, in the pre-philosophic city, according to which the city sees itself as subject and subservient to the divine in the ordinary understanding of the divine or looks up to it. Only by beginning at this point will we be open to the full impact of the all-important question which is coeval with philosophy although the philosophers do not frequently pronounce it—the question *quid sit deus*.<sup>7</sup>

### III

The most obvious contribution of *Leo Strauss: Man of Peace* to understanding Strauss is its consideration of his teaching regarding international law and politics, in which Howse claims to see “the tension between Jerusalem and Athens” (150). The political moderation that is the result of his philosophical radicalism is said to lead to Strauss’s affirmation of international law where it “stands for justice or is a hedge against the worst forms of humanity” (150). Yet the philosophical rejection of modern philosophical premises, idealistic and nihilistic alike, and his embrace of Thucydides’s view that “humanity and civilization acquire their specific meaning and pathos through the interplay of motion and rest, the perpetual rhythms represented by growth and expansion, transgression and rebellion, destruction and return, repentance,” allow Strauss to “demur” when international law “is characterized as a project or trajectory to make humankind better, less harsh, or less evil in the long run” (150). Howse shows that Strauss remained within his Thucydidean perspective when teaching courses on Kant and Grotius, the result of which was a perspective sympathetic to international law or Grotius’s *ius gentium* but also critical of utopianism. There is much to say regarding this part of Howse’s scholarship, but here I will limit myself to noting that this discussion will

<sup>7</sup> Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 241.

indeed become a touchstone for further writing regarding Strauss's thoughts on international law, and that Howse's conclusions confirm my assessment of his title as a polemical rather than philosophical provocation.

That the European Union haunts nearly every discussion in the book of international law gives the reader the impression that this is a regime that Howse prays that Strauss might have prayed for, but Howse never goes so far as to say that his prayer was answered in Strauss's seminars. Strauss's Thucydidean perspective is, like Kant's, hostile to the "soulless despotism" of a world state, but not principally opposed to international treaties or federations insofar as these serve the need for peaceful rest. However, neither is there much in this Thucydidean perspective to recommend the superiority of an international federation such as the EU or the supremacy of international judiciaries such as the rationalist European Court of Human Rights or the European Court of Justice. The fact that according to Howse, Strauss, unlike Habermas, recognized and was interested in courts as part of the division of sovereignty does not commit him to a doctrine of judicial *supremacy* or *international* constitutionalism. The moderate United Kingdom he praised in his German nihilism lecture lacked *both*. This renders his title a provocation only to those convinced that Strauss was some war-loving hybrid of realist and neoconservative. Of course, the audience whom Howse understands to interpret Strauss in this light is dismissed in the first few pages of the book.

This brings us back to the criticism of Strauss Howse draws from Strauss's own criticism of Nietzsche. Howse asks the reader to recall Strauss's criticism of Nietzsche from "What Is Political Philosophy?":

He used much of his unsurpassable and inexhaustible power of passionate and fascinating speech for making his readers loathe, not only socialism and communism, but conservatism, nationalism, and democracy as well. After having taken upon himself this great political responsibility he could not show his readers a way toward political responsibility. He left them no choice except between that irresponsible indifference to politics and irresponsible political options. (175)

Howse argues that Strauss's criticism of Nietzsche applies to Strauss himself, as he should have been aware that his method of dialogical engagement with thinkers of the past would touch readers "who would be more moved by the 'passionate and fascinating speech' often used by Strauss to present the extreme or the temptation to the extreme than the subtle and intricate logic, often muted, that leads back to moderation" (175). Does Howse think that Strauss should have remained silent regarding certain thinkers or thoughts?

Or been more secretive? This criticism is made all the more confusing by Howse's failure to clearly address the role played by Nietzsche in Strauss's *t'shuvah*. If Strauss moved away from Nietzsche, why did he remain trapped in Nietzsche's irresponsible attitude towards political writing, as Howse maintains? Why did Strauss allow Nietzsche to remain dangerous in his own writings? It also seems flatly contradicted by Howse's concluding paragraphs, where he praises Strauss's "philosophical modesty" (181). Howse's frustrations with Strauss's reception can frustrate the reader intrigued by his more philosophical provocations.

In the end the reader is given the impression that Howse remains unsure what to make of Strauss's way of life itself. Was it a naive project of radical philosophical *zetesis* resulting in political moderation for some of its students, but extremism in many others? Or was the real focus always philosophical and only coincidentally political? As I've already hinted in this review, many will ignore this book or put it down when they read some of Howse's more polemical remarks. Such reactions may themselves prove shameful precisely because Strauss was not a teacher of polemics or partisan politics but of political philosophy.

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