

Interpretation

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The Political Theorizing of Aeschylus's *Persians*

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Abstract: Aeschylus's *Persians* dramatically represents the Athenian victory at Salamis from the perspective of the Persian royal court at Susa. Although the play is in some sense a patriotic celebration of Athenian self-government, it also functions as tragedy that generates sympathy for the suffering of its main character, Xerxes. Although scholars have argued whether the play is primarily patriotic or tragic, I argue that it holds in tension both kinds of elements in such a fashion as to invite its audience to reflect on the political ramifications of Persia's failed empire for Athens's own nascent Delian League, which at the time of the performance of the play was already showing hegemonic tendencies.

Keywords: Aeschylus, *Persians*, Imperialism, Athenian hegemony, Greek Tragedy

Aeschylus's *Persians* dramatizes one of history's greatest reversals, the Greek defeat of the Persian army and navy of Xerxes at Salamis in 480 BCE. The parodos of the play catalogs the "city-sacking" forces whose destiny the chorus of Persian elders and advisors claims is "conducting wars that destroy towered walls, clashes of chariots in battle, and the uprooting of cities" (104–5).¹ The exodus, by contrast, depicts the king and chorus bewailing the "triple-oared" (1075)—namely, the Athenian fleet, that "wall of wood" which preserved Athens even while its acropolis was sacked.² Between such

¹ Unless otherwise noted, parenthetical references within the text are to the Greek line numbers in Edith Hall, *Aeschylus Persians* (Oxford: Aris and Phillips, 2007). I generally follow the translation in *Persians, Seven against Thebes, Suppliants, Prometheus Bound*, trans. Alan Sommerstein (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), with occasional emendation.

² Aeschylus appears to have the Persian messenger (348–49) allude to the Delphic oracle's enigmatic claim that Zeus will give Athens "a wall of wood, which alone shall abide by the foeman" (Hdt. 7.141).

a beginning and ending is the representation of Xerxes's twofold attempt to yoke together Asia and Europe, Persian and Greek. By turning sea into land at the bridging of the Hellespont, Xerxes rashly sought to bring together two land masses and place a yoke upon the sea itself (72), an act which the gods themselves undo when they turn land into water (or melt the ice on the river Strymon), drowning the Persian survivors who retreated from Salamis (495–505). According to his mother's dream, Xerxes also naively sought to yoke together two siblings, the Greek and Persian peoples, for the betterment of each (189–96, cf. 50)—a question of hegemony that Athens herself faced following the liberation of Ionian cities in Anatolia in the years after Salamis.

Persians depicts the Athenian victory over Persia from the perspective of the Persian court sitting in Susa. From the court's perspective, the play begins with optimistic confidence about Xerxes's expedition against the Greeks. But a messenger conveys the terrible news of Persia's defeat along with a vivid account of how the battle at Salamis unfolded. The defeat is so horrible that the Persian queen conjures the shade of Darius so that he can offer fatherly advice to his rash son, who finally arrives on the stage at the end of the play, utterly defeated with quiver empty. The play closes with Xerxes and the chorus of Persian elders performing a *kommos* or extended lyrical chant of ritual lamentation. The play was performed as the middle play of a tetralogy which won first prize at the City Dionysia in 472, eight years after the sack of Athens and the battle of Salamis. Clearly, the play was composed and produced during a time in which the Delian League (founded in 477) was beginning to show hegemonic tendencies. As early as 480 Themistocles had indemnified, and brought under siege, Ionian cities such as Andros and Paros for failure to contribute to the Hellenic League, the alliance which preceded the Delian League (Hdt. 8.111–12). In the summer of 479, Greek forces defeated the Persian army at Mycale and precipitated the liberation of the Ionian Greek cities which would ultimately comprise the Delian League (Hdt. 9.106). Athens took control of Greek forces from Sparta following the successful siege of Byzantium in 478 and the Delian League conducted its first Athenian-led campaign at Eion in 476. In the early 470s or the late 460s the Euboean city of Carystus declined membership in the league and was subsequently besieged and plundered; Naxos's attempt to secede from the league resulted in the destruction of its walls and its reduction to subject status within the league.³

For quotations from Herodotus I generally follow *The History*, trans. David Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

³ Although the precise chronology of the events at Eion, Carystus, and Naxos is uncertain (Thucydides 1.98 offers only the succession of events without a chronology), that they took place

Although *Persians* was performed against the backdrop of Athens's nascent hegemony, scholars are divided over the tragedy's political teaching about empire.⁴ At one end of the spectrum are interpretations which read the drama as patriotic praise of Athens's victory over Persia—in greater or lesser degree as jingoistic or chauvinistic. At the other end of the spectrum are interpretations which read *Persians* as a cautionary tale about imperialism, the beginning of a tradition—echoed in Herodotus and Thucydides—according to which “the story of an empire is a tragedy which ends in lament.”⁵ There is evidence supporting interpretations on both sides of the spectrum. Aeschylus clearly represents Salamis as a specifically Athenian victory, one which occasions pride for its victors. At the same time, it is hard to imagine the invocations of Persian suffering as producing no pity and fear or worries about Athenian hegemony.

Most scholars have sought to resolve this impasse by emphasizing either the patriotic elements or the tragic elements of the play. Instead, I would like to argue that the tension of *Persians* is purposeful. As Peter Euben points out, tragedy is different from other Athenian political institutions because of its “theoretical” character: tragedy “enabled its citizen audience to reflect on their lives with a generality denied them in their capacity as political actors. Alone among the Hellenes, the Athenians possessed an institution that, in its general rumination on the human condition and refusal to be partisan or programmatic, was theoretical in nature.”⁶ I take such “reflection” to be distinct from (although obviously connected to) deliberation about policy alternatives which political actors undertake. Viewers of a tragedy are put into the odd position of not having to make a choice even though a drama presents them with options and actions to evaluate. No doubt, the audience's responses to and evaluation of elements within a tragedy will influence how they deliberate when, for instance, in the assembly they are presented with arguments for and against alternative policy options. But theorizing

within several years' proximity to the performance of *Persians* in 472 seems clear.

⁴ Two of the more prominent interpretations are those of Thomas Harrison, *Emptiness of Asia: Aeschylus' "Persians" and the History of the Fifth Century* (London: Duckworth, 2000), 103–15, which presents a patriotic interpretation, and David Rosenbloom, *Aeschylus: Persians* (London: Duckworth, 2006), 141–46, which presents a tragic interpretation.

⁵ Rosenbloom, *Aeschylus: Persians*, 95; see also J. Peter Euben, “The Battle of Salamis and the Origins of Political Theory,” *Political Theory* 14 (1986): 359–90, and Kurt A. Raaflaub, “Herodotus, Political Thought, and the Meaning of History,” *Arethusa* 20 (1987): 221–48.

⁶ Euben, “Battle of Salamis,” 367.

introduces an element of reflection and even “make believe” that is simply absent from the actual deliberations of political actors.

I would like to apply Euben’s insight to Aeschylus’s *Persians* and argue that the play is theoretical in that it presents two opposing views of hegemony and refuses to adjudicate between them. Rather, *Persians* leaves it up to its Athenian audience to ruminate about the victory at Salamis and consider its ramifications for a policy of empire. The “theoretical” perspective of Aeschylus’s play is polyphonic and necessarily open-ended. Interpretations which exclusively endorse only the patriotic or the tragic elements of the drama fail to see that those elements are not mutually exclusive but ultimately, together, productive of thought.

Such an object of thought is decidedly political. Although *Persians* is a drama with cosmic overtones, I argue that the question which the play occasions is primarily political and concerns the direction which Athenian hegemony should take in its recently established Delian League. The last few decades have seen significant scholarly reflection on how to understand the politics of Athenian tragedy, and I follow Goldhill in viewing *Persians* (like Attic theater more generally) as “not so much a commentary on *ta politika* as part of it.”⁷ Yet it remains to determine in what way *Persians* is a part of *ta politika* of Athens in the decade following their victory at Salamis. Although at first glance the political systems of Athens and Persia are profoundly different, both faced the dilemma of whether to pursue hegemony within their region, and if so, what sort of hegemony.

To support the claim that *Persians* represents an exercise in Aeschylus’s political theorizing, the first two sections of my paper survey the elements of the play which I claim exist in unresolved tension. The first section examines the patriotic side of the drama; the second section argues that *Persians* should be understood as a tragedy which occasions fear and pity, including for its main character Xerxes. In the third and final section, I contrast my political interpretation of *Persians* with apolitical ones. The three sections jointly establish a claim for viewing Aeschylus as a political theorist of Athenian hegemony (among his other brilliant skills as a *didaskalos* or teacher of Athens).

⁷ Simon Goldhill, “Civic Ideology and the Problem of Difference: The Politics of Aeschylean Tragedy, Once Again,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 120 (2000): 35. D. M. Carter, *The Politics of Greek Tragedy* (Exeter: Bristol Phoenix, 2007), 21–63, offers an excellent overview of frameworks employed to interpret the politics of Athenian tragedy; A. F. Garvie, *Aeschylus Persae* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), xvi–xxii, surveys the question in the case of *Persians*.

PATRIOTIC ELEMENTS IN *PERSIANS*

In his *Frogs*, Aristophanes stages a contest in Hades between Euripides and Aeschylus concerning who is the more admired poet, and the standard of admiration consists in who makes people better members of their community (1008–9). Aeschylus responds that after producing *Seven Against Thebes*—a play which teaches valor in battle—“I produced my *Persians*, which taught them to yearn always to defeat the enemy, and thus I adorned an excellent achievement” (1026–27, trans. Henderson). Within the dramatic and political context of the *Frogs*, which was staged near the end of the Peloponnesian War in 404 and laments the decline in Athens’s military and theatrical excellence, the invocation of Aeschylus betrays nostalgia for an earlier Athens. But whereas Aristophanes’s Aeschylus appears to understand the inculcation of martial virtue as the unproblematic goal of the theatrical *didaskalos*, according to my interpretation, the Aeschylus who authored *Persians* has a far more sophisticated understanding of martial virtue, one which includes recognition of the limits of martial virtue. Although yearning to defeat one’s enemies may be a part of martial virtue, it cannot be the whole of it, since courage may also require coexistence with one’s enemies. More generally, true martial excellence discerns whether a city should (or should not) seek hegemony. Although a patriotic reading of *Persians* can account for Aristophanes’s more simplistic notion of martial virtue within the drama, only a theoretical reading of *Persians* can capture the more sophisticated notion of martial excellence which the drama aims to produce. It is only within that broader questioning framework that one can appreciate the context of his patriotic praise of Athenian martial excellence at the battle of Salamis.

The drama’s major objects of praise can be isolated in a thirteen-line exchange between the Persian queen and the chorus of Persian elders.⁸ The exchange runs as follows (231–45):

QUEEN:

There is something I wish to learn, my friends. Where in the world do they say that Athens is situated?

CHORUS:

Far away, near the place where the Lord Sun declines and sets.

QUEEN:

And yet my son had a desire to make that city his prey [*thērasai*]?

⁸ A point made by Harrison, *Emptiness of Empire*, 55–60.

CHORUS:

Yes, because all Greece would then become subject [*hupēkoos*] to the King.

QUEEN:

Do they have such great numbers of men in their army?

CHORUS:

And an army of a quality that has already done the Medes a great deal of harm.

QUEEN:

Why, are they distinguished for their wielding of the drawn bow and its darts?

CHORUS:

Not at all; they use spears for close combat and carry shields for defense.

QUEEN:

And what else apart from that? Is there sufficient wealth in their stores?

CHORUS:

They have a fountain of silver, a treasure in their soil.

QUEEN:

And who is the shepherd, master [*kapidespozei*], and commander over them?

CHORUS:

They are not called slaves [*douloi*] or subjects [*hupēkooi*] to any man.

QUEEN:

How can they resist an invading enemy?

CHORUS:

Well enough to have destroyed the large and splendid army of Darius.

QUEEN:

What you say is fearful [*deina*] to think about, for the parents of those who have gone there.

The stichomythia underscores three patriotic characteristics of Athens that are echoed elsewhere in the tragedy, namely, the preeminence of Athens among the Greeks, the preeminence of Athenian martial virtue, and the role which Athenian self-government plays in producing the former two characteristics. With respect to the first characteristic, it is telling that the queen

asks only about Athens and the chorus suggests that strategically, conquering Athens is the key to conquering mainland Greece. Although *Persians* alludes once to the decisive Spartan victory in 479 at Plataea which ended Xerxes's invasions (816–20), its audience could be forgiven for thinking that from the Persian perspective, their wars with Greece were reducible to the battles of Salamis and Marathon, namely, battles in which Athenian generals and forces were decisive (cf. 236, 244, and 475). Aeschylus appears to be echoing a story also found in Herodotus when he has both the messenger and King Darius state “remember Athens” (*memnēsth' Athēnōn*, 824, cf. 285). According to Herodotus, following the destruction of Sardis, Darius ordered a slave to repeat to him thrice daily “Master, remember the Athenians” (Hdt. 5.105; cf. 6.94). *Persians* suggests that the defeat at Salamis will let the king of an empire that stretched from Egypt to the Indus river finally remember the largely insignificant city that was early fifth-century Athens.

The chorus's claim that Athenians fight by spear and shield rather than by bow and dart plays upon Athenian pride in its martial excellence in juxtaposition with Persian forces who champion projectiles. Hoplite battle required courage, discipline, and even the social status that comes from being able to afford one's own armor; by contrast, the Athenians viewed Persian soldiers as less courageous fighters because of their use of bow and dart (see, for instance 85, 146–49) and Xerxes famously enters the stage wearing an empty quiver of arrows (1020–23). Elsewhere in the drama Persian forces are contrasted negatively with Athenians in naval battle: Athenian triremes emerge at first light in orderly fashion “with cheerful confidence” (*eupsuchō(i) thrasei*, 394) and with good order and discipline (*eutaktōs...kosmō(i)*, 399, 400), singing a paean or song praising their freedom. Although Persian forces, duped by the Athenian's deception, are initially characterized as “not disorderly” (*ouk akosmōs*, 374) under cover of night, once they are vanquished by Greek forces in battle, they flee in disarray (*akosmō(i)*, 422); the same is said of the Persian land forces composed of nobles who are butchered at Psyttaleia and of the surviving forces during the general retreat at Strymon (470, 481). Although the parodos of the play characterizes Xerxes's army as invincible—a great flood of men incapable of being controlled by a barrier (87–92)—by the time of the *kommos*, Persian forces are characterized as luckless in war (*dupol-emon*, 1013).

The claim that Athenians—while neither slave nor subject to any man—are nonetheless capable of defeating even Darius's army at Marathon plays upon a final patriotic theme found throughout the play, namely, the view that

Athenian freedom and self-government were responsible for their victory over Persian forces.⁹ To the Persian queen, Athenian freedom is an impediment to order; to the Athenians, it is the source of their strength. From the outset of *Persians*, the chorus claims that Persian forces seek to place “the yoke of slavery” upon Greece (50) and the queen characterizes Xerxes’s expedition against Athens as a “hunt” (*thērasai*, 233), as if the Greeks were animals.¹⁰ The Persian perspective is clearest in the queen’s ominous dream, which she describes on the eve of battle:

There seemed to come into my sight two finely dressed women, one arrayed in Persian, the other in Doric robes, outstandingly superior in stature to the women of real life, of flawless beauty, and sisters of the same stock: one, by the fall of the lot, was a native and inhabitant of Greece, the other a barbarian. I seemed to see these two raising some kind of strife [*stasis*] between themselves; my son, perceiving this, tried to restrain and calm them, yoked them under his chariot, and passed the yoke-strap under their necks. One of them, thus arrayed, towered up proudly and kept her jaw submissively in harness; but the other began to struggle, tore the harness from the chariot with her hands, dragged it violently along without bridle or bit, and smashed the yoke in half. My son fell out. His father Darius appeared, standing beside him and showing pity; but when Xerxes saw him, he tore the robes that clothed his body. (181–99)

The dream foreshadows the narrative arc of the remainder of the play, but most important is its presentation of Persian self-understanding of Greek and Persian polarity. From the queen’s perspective, both the Persian and Greek peoples—represented by the two sisters—are in need of obedience and mastery to eliminate their intrafamilial strife or *stasis* (188). Xerxes’s mission is to serve as “master, shepherd, and commander” (245) to both peoples, ultimately so that both peoples can realize their innate beauty and noble natures. Thus the queen’s amazement: how can a people without a master, shepherd, or commander field a dominant military force?

The freedom which the queen represents as the characteristic of an unruly sister, the Athenians represent as the cause of their victory.¹¹ The battle of

⁹ Freedom (*eleutheria*) is said to be what will undo the Persian empire when its soldiers will no longer wear the yoke of monarchy (591–95). Herodotus, writing a half century after Aeschylus, also claims that it was Athens’s transition from tyranny to democracy that began its ascent to military power (Hdt. 5.78).

¹⁰ The image is reversed in the description of the slaughter of drowned Persian sailors who were pummeled like a catch of fish (425).

¹¹ As Plato and Aristotle note, freedom is a defining characteristic of democratic self-government

Salamis commences when the Greek fleet rows out to meet the Persian vessels, crying, "Come on, sons of the Greeks, for the freedom of your homeland, for the freedom of your children, your wives, the temples of your fathers' gods, and the tombs of your ancestors! Now all is at stake!" (404–5). When the queen notes that the vanquished leader, Xerxes, will not be held accountable—will not be audited by his city (*ouch hupeuthunos polei*, 213)—she again underscores the difference between Athenians who democratically hold their leaders accountable and an unaccountable Persian king who "leads" his naval commanders by the threat of beheading (370–71).¹² It is difficult to imagine an audience, many of whom fought in the battle eight years earlier, viewing these scenes in the shadow of the acropolis (recently pillaged by Xerxes's troops) feeling anything except extraordinary pride for the victory at Salamis.

In sum, *Persians* repeatedly praises Athens in patriotic terms, both directly and by posing contrasts between Persians and Athenians. Athenian preeminence among other Greeks, its martial excellence, and its self-government based in democratic freedom are all showcased in *Persians* in an unblemished and patriotic form. No interpretation of the play can ignore or diminish these patriotic elements. And yet, *Persians*—as a dramatization rather than a retelling of history—at the same time holds out the events of Salamis as a cautionary tale about how hegemony can become overreaching empire. Aeschylus theorizes about politics by holding both of these elements of martial success side by side in a fashion which challenges his audience to consider the ramifications of the battle of Salamis for their own future course of action.

THE TRAGIC FUNCTIONS OF *PERSIANS*

Although *Persians*'s cautionary teaching on empire is juxtaposed with its teaching on the strengths of Athenian self-government, yet some have denied that the play presents any such cautions. For instance, Craig suggests that *Persians* is only nominally a tragedy and that in fact it functions more like an epinicion or victory ode.¹³ It is necessary, then, to argue that the drama exhibits not only the form of tragedy—namely, that it includes actors and a chorus, and is structured with episodes and stasima—but it also must function as a tragedy. Although identifying a univocal function for tragedy is

(*Republic* 8 557b–e; *Politics* 6.2.1317a40–b16).

¹² A Persian queen, unfamiliar with Athens, would hardly know of its political practice of auditing (*euthuna*). *Persians* ultimately claims that Xerxes is held accountable by Zeus the "stern assessor" (*euthunos barus*, 828), which is divine rather than political accountability.

¹³ J. D. Craig, "The Interpretation of Aeschylus' *Persae*," *Classical Review* 38 (1924): 98–101.

a Sisyphean task, certainly one function of tragedy is producing fear and pity in its audience. As Munteanu notes, although different classical tragedies produce fear and pity in their audiences in different ways, there is no dispute about the claim that tragedy's emotional production includes pity and fear.¹⁴ The sticking point for viewing *Persians* as tragic concerns whether the play could produce pity and fear in its Athenian audience. Scholars have denied that the play would have produced pity and fear on two grounds. First, some have argued that *Persians*, as the depiction of a historical event, falls outside the genre of tragedy.¹⁵ Second, some have argued that the proximity of the play's performance to the events it depicts would preclude an Athenian audience from identifying or empathizing with Persian suffering.¹⁶

In response to the first objection, which calls into question whether *Persians* can function as a tragedy because of its historical object of representation, I would like to argue first that although *Persians* is unique among surviving tragedies in taking as its object a historical rather than a mythical action, nonetheless there is ample evidence of Aeschylus's contemporaries writing other "historical tragedies." In choosing to write a tragedy based on a historical event, Aeschylus modeled his drama on Phrynichus's *Phoenician Women* (produced in 476) which also dramatized the naval defeat at Salamis and which Aeschylus alludes to in the opening lines of *Persians*. More infamously, in approximately 492 Phrynichus produced the *Capture of Miletus*, which depicted the siege and destruction of that Ionian city. According to Herodotus (6.21), the play's production caused the audience to burst into tears; Athens fined Phrynichus one thousand drachmas "for reminding them of their own evils" and ordered that the play never be performed again.¹⁷ Although "historical" tragedies are unusual in the surviving corpus, it is wrong to treat them as quasi-historical documentaries rather than literary productions. As Aristotle points out in his *Poetics*, although the poet is a maker of stories, "even should his poetry concern actual events, he is no less a poet for that, as there is nothing to prevent some actual events being probable as well as possible, and it is through probability that the poet makes his material from

¹⁴ Dana Munteanu, *Tragic Pathos: Pity and Fear in Greek Philosophy and Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁵ Craig, "Interpretation of Aeschylus' *Persae*," and A. J. Podlecki, *The Political Background of Aeschylean Tragedy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966).

¹⁶ See, for instance, Harrison, *Emptiness of Asia*, 51, and Munteanu, *Tragic Pathos*, 163.

¹⁷ See further David Rosenbloom, "Shouting Fire in a Crowded Theater: Phrynichos' *Capture of Miletus* and the Politics of Fear in Early Attic Tragedy," *Philologus* 137 (1993): 159–96.

them” (9.1451b29–33).¹⁸ Admittedly, Aristotle’s *Poetics* takes as its model Sophoclean rather than Aeschylean tragedy. Nonetheless, its inclusion of historical events within the domain of the tragic poet calls into question the claim that in principle the depiction of a historical event would preclude a play functioning as a tragedy.

A second argument against the claim that *Persians* does not function like a tragedy because of its historical object calls into question the accuracy of thinking of the drama as primarily “historical” rather than poetic. Although Aeschylus interjects moments of verisimilitude into the play (perhaps foremost in the messenger’s account of the battle of Salamis), viewing the drama as historical underestimates the poetic fictions which the poet incorporates into *Persians*, fictions which neither his Athenian audience nor the judges at the City Dionysia (who awarded the play first place) found problematic. Consider the following three instances of Aeschylus’s poetic license. First, Aeschylus depicts Darius as the voice of Greek wisdom and uses his character as a foil to Xerxes. Aeschylus has Darius criticize his son for bridging the continents of Asia and Europe and conducting military campaigns on the Greek mainland (745–51), but as an Athenian audience would know full well, Darius did the same during his own expedition into Scythia in 513 (which included the bridging of the Bosphorus) and his invasion of Attica in 490 (Hdt. 4.89, 6.102–4). A second instance of poetic license is Aeschylus’s depiction of the battle as including two equal parts, a naval component in the bay of Salamis and a land component on the island of Psyttaleia, which the messenger to the queen repeatedly emphasizes (433–34, 568, 676, 720, and 728). The parallel between land and sea components implies equal praise of Athenian naval and hoplite strengths and a humiliation of Persian nobles slaughtered at Psyttaleia. Nonetheless, Aeschylus’s depiction of the land battle on Psyttaleia appears to exaggerate its importance.¹⁹ Thirdly, the messenger’s depiction of an ill-fated retreat and destruction of the Persian remnant at the river Strymon allows Aeschylus to show the cosmic or divine reversal of Xerxes’s bridging of the Hellespont (495ff.): whereas Xerxes’s invasion began with the shackling and bridging of natural forces, it ends with natural forces destroying his retreating army. Nonetheless, the event appears to be Aeschylus’s

¹⁸ I have discussed this further in “Aristotle on the (Alleged) Inferiority of Poetry to History,” in *Reading Aristotle*, ed. R. Polansky and W. Wians (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

¹⁹ Barry Strauss, *The Battle of Salamis* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 193–95, documents what historians know of the engagement at Psyttaleia. Herodotus devotes only a paragraph to the incident (8.95).

invention.²⁰ Aeschylus exercises poetic license in his “historical” tragedy, and it is a misunderstanding of dramatic verisimilitude to claim that such poetic license is precluded on “historical” grounds.

Aeschylus’s clear examples of poetic license also point to what I take to be one of his most provocative assertions about hegemony and empire. As Kennedy notes, Aeschylus’s juxtaposition of Darius and Xerxes establishes the distinction between Darius as “a fine model for a hegemonic leader of a volunteer league” and Xerxes as the overreaching face of empire.²¹ No doubt, the lesson of Xerxes is a cautionary tale about rash expansion. But the representation of Darius as the leader of a professional and voluntary multiethnic army presents Aeschylus’s audience with an additional theoretical question, namely, how one distinguishes between good and bad hegemony. The play’s “softening” of Darius must have been breathtaking for the *Marathōnomachoi* in the audience. Nonetheless, consistent with my claim about the “theoretical” nature of the play, Aeschylus does not argue for or against either forms of hegemony. He merely presents options for his audience to reflect upon.

In response to the second objection, which calls into question whether *Persians* can function as a tragedy for an Athenian audience because of the proximity of its performance to the events it depicts, I argue that the play depicts the universalization of a historical event in such a way that any audience can experience fear and pity for its objects. Fear and pity, of course, are major themes throughout *Persians*, but most relevant to my argument are the fear and apprehension which the chorus and the Persian queen feel prior to the messenger’s announcement of the fate of Xerxes’s army and the pity and mourning which the chorus and Xerxes express in the *kommos* of the play. Aeschylus’s challenge (which his victory in 472 suggests he met) is to allow his audience to see themselves in the Persian predicament of the play; they would need to feel fear for the prospects of the departed army, just as they would fear for their own soldiers on campaign, and they would need to feel pity upon learning of the fate of the departed army, just as they would feel pity at the destruction of their own departed army. I suggest Aeschylus accomplishes such a goal by highlighting the commonality of Greeks and Persians, on one hand, and, on the other, making Xerxes a more sympathetic character.

²⁰ See further Bruce Lincoln, “Death by Water: Strange Events at the Strymon (*Persae* 492–507) and the Categorical Opposition of East and West,” *Classical Philology* 95 (2000): 12–20.

²¹ Rebecca F. Kennedy, “A Tale of Two Kings: Competing Aspects of Power in Aeschylus’ *Persians*,” *Ramus* 42 (2013): 70, 79.

Admittedly, showing the commonality of Greek and Persian is complicated by the fact that the play at times represents Persians as “the other” with respect to language use, social institutions, clothing, and even the practice of lamentation in public.²² And yet, in the retelling of the queen’s dream (analyzed above), Aeschylus underscores Greek and Persian commonality by suggesting that the two peoples are represented by sisters and their fighting is characterized as *stasis*, or intracommunity warfare.²³ The passage suggests that the difference between Greek and Persian is the result of location and upbringing rather than some innate or natural difference. Their experience with different institutions has given the two sisters different temperaments, especially with respect to authority; and it is wrong for Xerxes to think that the two sisters can be together yoked to the same chariot. But the difference between the two sisters does not subsume their commonality and even natural resemblance: it is only their artificial garments which allow the queen to distinguish them at first (183–84).

Persians also appeals to the universality of fear which loved ones experience in the absence of their sons, spouses, and fathers who are at war. The parodos and the first episode repeatedly remark on the fear and subsequent mourning of the parents and wives of the Persian forces (10–15, 63, 121–25).²⁴ Rather remarkably, Aeschylus sets the depiction of the Athenian naval victory within the Persian royal city of Susa, a setting which minimizes Athenian rejoicing and emphasizes Persian suffering. Even before knowledge of the defeat, Aeschylus has the chorus proclaim that Persian

Beds are filled with tears
because the men are missed and longed for:
Persian women, grieving amid their luxury, every one,
loving and longing for her husband,
having sent on his way the bold warrior who was her bedfellow
is left behind, a partner yoked alone [*monozux*]. (132–37)

As Gagarin notes, “the image of the women alone in the yoke reinforces the feeling that the wretchedness of the Persian families at home is directly

²² Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 76–98, is the classic statement of this position; Erich Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 11–12, cautions against overstatement.

²³ In the parodos (76–78), Aeschylus also has the chorus allude to the tradition that the Persians traced their descent to the Greek hero Perseus (Hdt. 7.61, 7.150).

²⁴ Ippokratis Kantzios, “The Politics of Fear in Aeschylus’ *Persians*,” *Classical World* 98 (2004): 3–19, notes that words denoting fear, concern, intimidation, and terror (such as *phrontis*, *tarbos*, *deos*, *phobos*, and *tromos*) appear almost twice as frequently in *Persians* as they do in the rest of Aeschylus’s surviving corpus.

connected to the departure of the expedition in its attempt to yoke Greece, for which it must first yoke the Hellespont.”²⁵ Aeschylus shows that the political problem facing Athens, for instance whether it should expand its control over the recently freed Ionian poleis of Asia Minor, is also a domestic problem. Military expansion, however glorious its results, always imposes a domestic cost, one which Aeschylus knew quite personally, given the death of his brother at the Athenian victory of Marathon (Hdt. 6.114).

In addition to emphasizing the commonality of Greeks and Barbarians and the universality of suffering in wartime, Aeschylus also transforms the main character of the play, Xerxes, into a pitiable character. Just as Aeschylus’s poetic license recasts Darius, who invaded Marathon, into the character type of the wise father, so too does it recast Xerxes, who sacked Athens and destroyed the temples on the Acropolis, into the character type of an inexperienced and rash son trying to succeed in the shadow of his father’s accomplishments. Xerxes’s inexperience is underscored several times in the play. For instance, from the perspective of the queen’s dream, his desire to rule stems from his naive response to *stasis* between Greeks and Persians rather than a desire to exploit others (187–88). The drama criticizes Xerxes only twice for tactical errors: he fails to recognize Themistocles’s deception on the eve of the battle and he was mistaken to place Persian nobles on the island of Psyttaleia (361, 454; cf. 550–53). Although these were unfortunate decisions, they are not the marks of a hubristic or wicked tyrant.²⁶

Aeschylus also makes the character of Xerxes pitiable by attributing his mistakes to his rash (*thourios* or *thrasus*) character. Indeed, Aeschylus exploits the ambiguity of the Greek terms, which can have both positive and negative connotations (e.g., bold versus rash). The chorus first characterizes Xerxes positively as *thourios archōn* (74) or “bold leader” in charge of populous Asia, but following the necromancy of Darius, the queen twice refers to *thourios Xerxes* or (as the context makes clear) “raging Xerxes” (718, 744). Both the Queen and Darius also attribute Xerxes’s decision to bridge the Hellespont to his youth (754, 782) or a temporary sickness of mind (751; cf. 726, 749). The army which Xerxes leaves behind after he retreats from Greece, which will subsequently be destroyed at Plataea (817), is characterized as hubristic and godless (807–12), but Darius distinguishes the army from his son and blames

²⁵ Michael Gagarin, *Aeschylean Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 38.

²⁶ Although *Persians* makes reference to hubris twice (808, 821), Garvie, *Aeschylus: Persae*, xxxii, argues persuasively that it is simplistic to read the play solely as the condemnation of hubristic overextension.

them each for different failings. In the case of the army, which had plundered the sacred images of the gods, “because of the evil they have done [*kakōs drasantes*], they are suffering evil to match it in full measure [*paschousi... kakōn*]” (813–14). But the verdict is different for Xerxes. In his final invocation to the queen, Darius states that

Zeus, I tell you, stands over and chastises arrogant minds, and he is a stern assessor. With this in mind, please advise Xerxes to show good sense [*sōphronein*]; warn him, with well-spoken admonitions, to stop offending the gods with his boastful rashness [*huperkompō(i) thrasei*]. (827–31)

Darius believes that *sōphrosunē* is within Xerxes’s grasp if he were to moderate his rashness. In her dream, the queen foreshadows that Darius will feel pity for his son (197); the final scene enacts such pity. Aeschylus makes Xerxes a pitiable character by underscoring the dynamic between a powerful father and the son who tragically seeks to imitate his successes. That his errors stem from inexperience and rashness makes his character (although not necessarily the historical person) someone with whom an audience can empathize.

Aeschylus dissolves the Athenian inability to empathize with their foes first by emphasizing their common humanity, and second by characterizing the errors of the play’s “hero” as ultimately pitiable rather than loathsome. The poet’s license with historical details introduces an ambiguity which lies at the heart of his political theorizing, one which indeed seems embedded in the dramatization of politics. Politics, like history, concerns particular judgments in highly specific and complicated contexts. No country simply “goes to war”; rather, a specific political administration addresses strategic, tactical, political, and even biographical questions, and chooses to wage war with a specific foe. Aeschylean drama, by contrast, regularly employs historical references—not only with the use of the battle of Salamis in *Persians*, but also with the invocation of the Areopagus in *Eumenides* or the first attested invocation of *dēmokratia* in the *Suppliants*. But Aeschylus recasts such historical details poetically in the perfection of his tragic art. Aeschylean political theorizing plays upon such ambiguity between what is historical and what is poetic or universal. The Athenian who believes that the martial and political virtues of his city’s self-government insulate his city from “oriental” or “Persian” royal imperialism is forced, through a viewing of *Persians*, to question the distance between democratic martial excellence and imperial martial excellence.

THE POLITICAL NATURE OF AESCHYLUS'S THEORIZING IN *PERSIANS*

In *Persians*, Aeschylus transforms the historical destruction of the Persian navy and army into a family tragedy about a father, son, and—from a Persian perspective—their extended sibling or familial clan (which they have paternal responsibility to yoke and direct). Whereas the former is a particular event, the latter is a universal story about loss and suffering. A queen, who enters the play on a chariot, is transformed into a mother concerned about her son's survival on the battlefield. A king, who invaded Attica and sought to make Athens an example of the costs of disobedience, is transformed into a sagacious father who pities and advises his son. And a godlike conqueror is transformed into an inexperienced and rash son who incautiously fails to live up to the accomplishments of his father. The son's military conquest strikes fear into the hearts of his parents, the parents and families of his soldiers, and the parents and families of his foes. At the same time, that conqueror's army and navy is defeated by self-governing sailors and soldiers who alone stop the Persian advance into Greece. That Athenian army and navy sent the conqueror home to his mother, a tattered remnant of the river-bridging autocrat. The play simultaneously holds together tragic emotions of fear and pity and invocations of Athenian pride and patriotism.

It is understandable thus that scholars such as Harrison and Rosenbloom, preeminent proponents of mutually exclusive patriotic and tragic readings of the play's attitude towards empire, can make strong arguments supporting their positions. Invocations of fear and pity for Persian suffering *are* central elements within the play; Athenian celebration over their victory at Salamis *also are* central elements within the play. As noted at the outset, my paper is the application of Euben's insight that tragedy is theoretical insofar as it enables its viewers "to reflect on their lives with a generality denied them in their capacity as political actors."²⁷ Although there are numerous ways in which a tragedy may be "theoretical," I claim that *Persians* is theoretical in its refusal to resolve this tension. The play occasions the space for its audience or readers to be able to debate, to criticize, and to think about weighing the various competing elements which the work takes up. In the case of *Persians*, programmatic closure is ultimately antithetical to theoretical reflection. And the desire of modern scholars to seek closure in Aeschylus's *Persians* seems to push against the inherently ambivalent closure often found in his surviving tragedies.

²⁷ Euben, "Battle of Salamis," 367.

Consider what I take to be a parallel theoretical moment in Aeschylus's *Suppliants*. The play tells the story of Danaus and his fifty daughters who flee Egypt and the fifty sons of their uncle Aegyptus (who wish to force them into marriage) to find refuge as suppliants in Argos, their ancestral home. The play includes a passage which preserves two of the earliest surviving evocations of the term *dēmokratia*.²⁸ Pelasgus, the king of Argos, calls the people to assembly to deliberate over the supplications of the Danaid women. Danaus and the chorus of his daughters report the results (600–605, 609–14):

DANAUS:

A most decisive decree has been passed by the people [*dēmou*].

CHORUS:

Welcome, old father; you bring splendid news. Tell us what the final decision is that has been reached, and in what direction the majority of the people's sovereign vote [*dēmou kratousa*]²⁹ went.

DANAUS:

The Argives have resolved, with no divided voice...that we shall have the right of residence [*metoikein*] in this land of freedom, with asylum and protection from seizure by any person; that no one, whether inhabitant or foreigner, may lay hands upon us; and that if force be applied, whoever among these citizens fails to come to our aid shall lose his civic rights and be driven into exile in the community.³⁰

Such a patriotic defense of the democratic protection of the vulnerable needs to be balanced with the results of this democratic action: the Argive protection of the Danaids results in war with the sons of Aegyptus and apparently the death and overthrow of the king Pelasgus who had argued on behalf of the Danaids at the assembly. Like the *Persians*, the *Suppliants* presents a complicated and polyphonic view of democracy, one which simultaneously preserves both its pro- and antidemocratic elements. My brief examination of the parallel theoretical moment in *Suppliants* suggests that the kind of theoretical claim I attribute to *Persians* is not unprecedented in Aeschylus's surviving corpus.

²⁸ See V. Ehrenberg, "Origins of Democracy," *Historia* 1 (1950): 522.

²⁹ In the next stasimon, Aeschylus has the chorus claim, "And may the people, which rules the city [*to damion, to ptolin kratuneī*] protect well the citizens' privileges, a government acting with craft and foresight for the common good" (*Supp.* 698–700).

³⁰ Sommerstein translation in *Persians, Seven against Thebes, Suppliants, Prometheus Bound* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

If viewing the *Persians* as preserving a tension between patriotism and tragic aspects of empire is superior to viewing the play as elevating one side of that tension over the other, nonetheless there are competing interpretations of how the play incorporates both elements. I have argued that when *Persians* juxtaposes praise for martial virtues alongside cautions about martial overreach, Aeschylus leaves those elements in tension to excite thought in his audience members.³¹ The drama thus invites thought about how to inculcate and produce a martial society which avoids its pitfall.³² According to such a reading, Aeschylus's *Persians* is a profoundly political play—one which challenges an Athenian audience to look at and evaluate both their present and their possible future selves.

By contrast, some scholars preserve the tension between patriotic and tragic elements in the play, but do so by reading *Persians* as an apolitical expression of cosmic forces. Gruen, for instance, reads the play as a cosmic tragedy in which “Hellenic arms are little more than pawns in the scheme of the gods to drive home the lesson to mortals.”³³ I call Gruen's reading of the play “apolitical” because ultimately the political characteristics of those pawns—that they are members of a self-governing polis or the royal palace at Susa—are irrelevant to the outcome of the drama. Gagarin, by contrast, takes the play to illustrate “the general precept that whatever grows too great eventually falls.”³⁴ I call Gagarin's reading of the play “apolitical” because it too seeks a resolution of the play on a cosmic level in some sort of coexistence of opposites (Gagarin likens it to the paradoxes of Heraclitus)³⁵ that is distant from human action and particular human actors. Gagarin's Aeschylus is a *didaskalos* more like a Taoist sage than Aristophanes's maker of good citizens. No doubt, there are cosmic forces at play in Aeschylus's plays, and Gagarin offers an especially rich interpretation oriented by such phenomena. And yet something seems profoundly missing when an interpretation of Aeschylus's play loses sight of its civic and indeed even practical objectives, much less the

³¹ Although my own position is indebted to the insights in Euben, “Battle of Salamis,” and Simon Goldhill, “Battle Narrative and Politics in Aeschylus' *Persae*,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 108 (1988): 189–93, about political theorizing within the civic space afforded by tragedy to question institutions, neither article explains in detail how *Persians* accomplishes that theorizing.

³² Kennedy, “Tale of Two Kings,” 65, 76–78, correctly points out that *Persians* even raises the question whether all forms of empire are equally problematic.

³³ Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity*, 19.

³⁴ Gagarin, *Aeschylean Drama*, 51.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

“questioning” and polyphonic character of a play in which Persian elders, a queen, and both living and resurrected kings speak.

Aeschylus's *Persians* holds out to its audience and readers views about actions that are in tension and thus in need of deliberation. Those actions seem unavoidably political in the sense that they concern choices which the Athenian polis needs to confront. A virtue of my reading of the play is that it preserves the significance of both its political and interrogative elements. I believe that *Persians*, somewhat like a Platonic dialogue, produces aporia in those who watch it or read it carefully, aporia that is theoretical insofar as it is productive of questioning. Whether other Aeschylean tragedies produce such a sense of aporia to the same extent and in a similar fashion is an open question relevant to the study of each play. But the interplay of conflicting views about the political phenomenon which *Persians* depicts and the tragedy's ultimate lack of closure on the advantages and disadvantages of martial excellence seems to go to the heart of what makes it a perennially powerful tragedy. Aristophanes was right to say that Aeschylus is a *didaskalos* or teacher who makes the citizens of his city better; but he was wrong to imply that Euripides alone helped people think by introducing critical reflection (*Frogs*, 971–75).³⁶

³⁶ An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Association for Political Theory in October 2012 as part of a working group panel, “The Politics of Drama, the Drama of Politics: Staging Ancient Political Thought,” which was organized by Jill Frank. I received superb feedback from panelists, including Jill, Arlene Saxonhouse, Steve Salkever, Joel Schlosser, Jeff Miller, and David McIvor, who commented on successive drafts of the paper. The paper received further comment on a panel at the May 2013 Northeast Political Science Association meeting from fellow panelists Stephanie Nelson, Jill Gordon, Liz Markovits, and Eleni Panagiotarakou. I am especially grateful to the editor and anonymous referees of *Interpretation* whose probing questions and challenges have improved the manuscript substantially.

The Qur'an, Reason, and Revelation: Islamic Revelation and Its Relationship with Reason and Philosophy

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Since the arrival of revealed religions and their encounter with Greek philosophy, the issue of the relationship between reason and revelation has been one of the most important problems in the history of thought. One important aspect of this issue is that it determines and guides the relationship that philosophers have with religious writings, which rest upon faith in divine revelation. Knowing that they are products of a miraculous contact with God, how should one approach them? Can they be read, understood, and evaluated like any other writing? Is a philosophic approach to revealed texts possible? More importantly, are revealed texts compatible with the spirit of philosophy? Do revealed texts approve or disapprove of the pursuit of knowledge through natural human reason?

In this paper, I intend to study the relationship between the Qur'an and philosophy. Naturally one must first explain what one means by "philosophy" and expound its relationship with divine revelation and faith. Let me begin with the question of reason before turning to philosophy. The clearest discussion of the reason-faith distinction is found in Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*.¹ As Aquinas explains, to have faith is to assent to something, to

The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful and constructive comments, which greatly contributed to improving the final version of the paper.

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. the English Dominican Fathers (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1922), II-II q. 1 a. 5.

accept it as true, because it is revealed by God. One *knows by faith* that something is true because God has *said* it. On the contrary, to know something by reason is to assent to it because it is perceived as true by our *reason*, that is, by our natural faculties. To *know by reason* is to assent to something independently of divine revelation: faith is “the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1).² The believer assents to that which he believes, not because he sees it or has rational proofs for it, but because he trusts in what divine revelation tells him.

Now even if such a clear-cut distinction between reason and revelation is also present in Islamic thought,³ many contemporary scholars of Islam tend to obfuscate or simply ignore it. Among the notable examples is Seyyed Hossein Nasr, an influential figure in the field of Islamic studies. Nasr defends and follows a form of Islamic philosophy that he calls “prophetic philosophy,” a kind of theosophy rather than philosophy.⁴ Nasr is a modern representative of the postclassical tradition of Islamic thought in which *falsafah* became transformed into *al-hikmat al-ilahiyyah* (divine wisdom) and gave birth to a synthesis of philosophy, mystical contemplation, and the esoteric reading of the Qur’an, Hadith, and the sayings of the imams and Sufi sages. This kind of philosophy easily leaps from the theoretical intellect of the Greeks to revelation and Hadith, ignoring the reason-faith distinction. Nasr’s synthetic perspective is particularly relevant to our question as he and some of his former students have recently edited a new translation of the Qur’an with annotations and several commentaries which clearly bear the influence of his philosophical approach.⁵ However, ignoring the reason-faith distinction is not limited to the traditionalists and the followers of the postclassical tradition of Islamic philosophy.

² I have used the King James Version for biblical quotations. I have also made extensive use of M. A. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an: English Translation with Parallel Arabic Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) which I have sometimes slightly modified to make it more literal. References to the Qur’an are identified by “Q.”

³ Alfarabi, “Enumeration of the Sciences,” in *The Political Writings: “Selected Aphorisms” and Other Texts*, trans. Charles E. Butterworth (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 81–84, V. 5, Uthman Amin 109ff.

⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The Quran and Hadith as Source and Inspiration of Islamic Philosophy,” in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (New York: Routledge, 2003), 27ff.

⁵ See especially Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al., eds., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 1645–59, 1659–79, 1719–37, 1737–51. To see the influence of Nasr’s philosophical approach on this commentary, apart from the traditional esoteric interpretation of well-known verses (e.g. Q 24:35), see the annotations on Q 2:189.

We can see the same trend among the modernist Muslims who, facing the incompatibility of the Qur'an with the latest discoveries of human reason and the ideals of modernity, try to provide a more rational and modern understanding of the Qur'an: among these figures is the influential intellectual Abdolkarim Soroush. The latter began his reflection on the relationship between Qur'anic revelation and reason by arguing that while the Qur'an, as the Word of God, is immutable, our understanding of it is necessarily historical as it is dependent on our particular situation and intellectual presuppositions. Soroush does not argue that there is no objective meaning in the Sacred Text independent of the subject. In this regard, he is not as radical as Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, another contemporary scholar of the Qur'an, who simply denied the possibility of any objective meaning. However, for Soroush, the Sacred Text itself, like Kant's noumenon, is out of our reach and can only be accessed by us through the use of our reason.⁶ In other words, we cannot speak of the one and *true* meaning of the Qur'an or *divine* knowledge properly, as our interpretation of scripture always reflects our human and historical presuppositions and any "divine knowledge" acquired from the Qur'an is in the end human.

In recent years, Soroush has made a much more radical claim by underscoring the role of the Prophet in the composition of the Qur'an. From this perspective, not only our knowledge and interpretation of the Qur'an but also the Qur'an itself is historical, as it is the product of the mind of the Prophet, and thus bears all of his human limitations and imperfections. According to Soroush, the crude corporalism, the dated scientific views, the Arabic character of the rewards promised to the believers, the inhuman social norms like slavery, and the cruel punishments like amputations found in the Qur'an each reflect the worldview of its author who lived in seventh-century Arabia.⁷

It seems that Soroush's whole direction of thought goes toward a rather conventional historicism and a denial of the divine origin of the Qur'an. In this regard, the Qur'an appears as a product of human reason rather than a divine message that must be followed by faith. However, Soroush is faced with a dilemma, because he wants to remain faithful to the traditional idea of the divine origin of the Qur'an and at the same time underscore the role

⁶ Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam*, ed. Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 31; Roy Jackson, *What Is Islamic Philosophy?* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 73–74. For Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd see Navid Kermani, *God Is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Quran*, trans. Tony Crawford (Cambridge: Polity, 2015), 113–14.

⁷ Abdolkarim Soroush, *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience*, trans. Nilou Mobasser (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 70–83.

of the Prophet in scripture. In other words, his objective is to subscribe to a radical historicism while also preserving the traditional belief in a sphere of knowledge beyond reason. Soroush's way out of the dilemma is this: not unlike Nasr, Soroush's preoccupation with the Persian mysticism of Rumi and the philosophical views of al-Ghazali pushes him toward an obfuscation of the reason-revelation distinction. He now speaks of the Qur'an as a product of "prophetic dreams" not unlike the *inspirations* of poets and mystics and denies that his recent theological views amount to a straightforward denial of the supernatural origin of the Qur'an.⁸

One can observe a similar dilemma in Fazlur Rahman's historicist hermeneutics of the Qur'an. Rahman also underscores the role of the Prophet in the composition of the Qur'an while trying to remain faithful to the traditional conception of the Qur'an as the Word of God. For Rahman, the "Qur'an is the divine response, through the Prophet's mind, to the moral-social situation of the Prophet's Arabia." Rahman's objective is to maintain the position according to which "the Qur'an is entirely the Word of God" while simultaneously arguing that the Qur'an is "also entirely the word of Muhammad."⁹ As one can see from the conclusions of Rahman's Qur'anic hermeneutics, it is doubtful that one can uphold both of these contradictory positions at the same time. Rahman contends that the truly divine message of the Qur'an is ethical: the Qur'an intends to advertise and establish "an egalitarian and just moral-social order."¹⁰ However, it is not clear why these moral values and objectives, which are also present in many purely rational philosophical systems, must be considered suprarational and why they had to be revealed to man by God. In other words, the efforts of Soroush, Rahman, and other scholars to harmonize the Qur'an with modern ideas seem to culminate either in an abstraction from the suprarational or in an obfuscation of the reason-faith distinction.

These cases show the importance of having a clear vision of the classical distinction between reason and faith in divine revelation when trying to discuss the relationship between the Qur'an and philosophy. A good example of such clarity in dealing with the question of revelation is found in

⁸ Abdolkarim Soroush, "Prophetic Dreams: Praise to a Sleep Better than Wakefulness," *BBC Persian*, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/persian/blogs/2016/05/160525_144_nazeran_soroush_bazargan; Katajun Amirpur, "The Expansion of the Prophetic Experience: Abdolkarim Sorūsh's New Approach to Qur'anic Revelation," *Die Welt des Islams* 51, no. 3-4 (2011): 428.

⁹ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 5, 31.

¹⁰ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 62.

Leo Strauss's writings on the Bible. One can benefit from his general framework to study the relationship between reason and revelation in the Qur'an. Strauss's framework is based on a fundamental question facing human beings: whether they can acquire that knowledge which they need to guide their lives by the unaided efforts of their natural powers, or whether their knowledge of such matters is dependent upon divine revelation. The first possibility is characteristic of philosophy and the second is that of revealed religion. What one knows by reason one knows through faculties available, in principle, to every human being. The source of rational knowledge is ordinary sense perceptions and it is the result of reflection upon what one acquires through senses. This natural human knowledge must be contrasted with the supernatural knowledge available through revelation and contact with the divine. The latter is given exclusively by God to those who through supernatural means are in contact with him. In other words, the natural rational knowledge of philosophers is different from the supernatural divine knowledge of the prophets and men of god found in revealed texts like the Bible. This is not to imply that the Bible, as a product of revelation, does not *occasionally* make use of reasoning and arguments. Indeed, reasoning and argument are also found in the Bible. For example, we can see evidence of the biblical use of arguments in the following passage: "He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see?" (Ps. 94:9). The reasoning being that the God who has made a sense organ also possesses the faculty of sensing. But even here, in this uncommon example of reasoning, the Bible implies and *presupposes* the other part of the argument: God made the ear.¹¹ In other words, the mere use of reason in the Bible must be distinguished from philosophy in the strict sense. For Strauss, revelation is distinguished from philosophy in that it simply *asserts* what is true without supporting the assertion with *arguments*. We know that the world was created by God "by virtue of declaration, pure and simple, by divine utterance ultimately."¹² Assertion is the core and essence of revealed knowledge of the Bible. There is a clear contrast between the reasoned, natural, and verifiable approach of philosophy and the indemonstrable, supernatural, and rationally unverifiable assertions of revelation.¹³

¹¹ Leo Strauss, transcript of "Seminar in Political Philosophy: Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (Spring 1964)," session 3, April 6, 1964, p. 43, Leo Strauss Center, University of Chicago.

¹² Leo Strauss, "On the Interpretation of Genesis," in *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity*, ed. Kenneth Hart Green (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 369.

¹³ John J. Ranieri, *Disturbing Revelation: Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, and the Bible* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 116–24; Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation: A Theology of Revelation in the World's Religions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

One other aspect of Strauss's framework that would be helpful towards our study of the Qur'an is that Strauss rejects the possibility of a synthesis of reason and revelation and argues that dependence on either of these two different kinds of knowledge results in two different and *opposite* ways of life: "the one thing needful according to Greek philosophy is the life of autonomous understanding. The one thing needful as spoken by the Bible is the life of obedient love."¹⁴ One brings the autonomy, self-reliance, curiosity, and doubt that are characteristic of philosophy, while the other accounts for the heteronomy, dependence, faith, and certitude that characterize faith in revelation and religion. No harmonization or synthesis of philosophy and religion is possible because they both proclaim their exclusivity: a life of obedience to divine wisdom or a life of free insight are the two opposing alternatives available to man.¹⁵ From the Bible's perspective, philosophic doubt and the quest for knowledge are either superfluous or impious.¹⁶ Philosophy necessarily enters into conflict with revealed religions because these religions are based on the idea that the Creator of the world, through His prophets or by His incarnation, has revealed to man the most important knowledge about the world, god, and the purpose of life, and that this knowledge is more complete and comprehensive than the knowledge that man, by his own forces, can achieve. From the height of divine wisdom revealed by God, the human knowledge of the philosophers is at best incomplete or, at worst, wrong and a sign of vanity.¹⁷

ARGUMENT FOR REVELATION

Taking the above framework into account, we can now ask: What is the relationship between the reason-revelation dichotomy and the Qur'an? Should the Qur'an be approached as a work of revelation rather than a work of reason? Must we put the Qur'an against philosophy in the same way that the Bible is the antagonist of philosophy? The surest way to discuss this issue is

¹⁴ 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), 104.

¹⁵ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 74–75; Leo Strauss, "Liberal Education and Responsibility," in *In Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 22; Leo Strauss, "Thucydides: The Meaning of Political History," in *Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, 73; Ehud Luz, "How to Read the Bible According to Leo Strauss," *Modern Judaism* 25, no. 3 (2005): 264–84.

¹⁶ Leo Strauss, "Jerusalem and Athens," in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 172.

¹⁷ See Ps. 94:11, 1 Cor. 1:19, 3:19, Jer. 8:9, Isa. 29:14.

to consult the Qur'an itself and begin at the beginning.¹⁸ According to traditional accounts, the opening of sura Al-'Alaq (Q 96:1–5) was the first Qur'anic revelation.¹⁹ Ibn Ishaq reports that Muhammad used to go alone into the cave of Hira where he would spend several days in meditation. One night the angel of revelation, Gabriel, comes to him and commands him to "read." Mohammed replies, "What shall I read?" The angel insists and "pressures" him three times and every time Mohammed says the same thing: "What shall I read?" "Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One who taught by the pen, who taught man what he did not know" (Q 96:3–5). In these first lines of Qur'an, it is emphasized that man is taught by the Creator. The allusion to "pen" is also significant: it has always been the most important and elementary instrument of learning and teaching, and there are some traditional reports that claim that the 68th sura, entitled Al-Qalam ("the pen") was the second sura revealed to Muhammad. Traditionally Muslims have drawn the conclusion from these verses that the Prophet was illiterate,²⁰ a claim that was supposedly advanced to refute the charge that he had plagiarized ideas present in Judeo-Christian writings (see Q 29:48, 2:78, 3:20, 3:75, 62:2). According to these traditions, the man who was charged with transmitting God's revelation was illiterate and therefore could not have composed the Qur'an. However, it seems that the message of these first verses goes beyond stressing the illiteracy of the Prophet and hence the divine origin of the Book.

¹⁸ Another possibility is to engage in a study of Islamic tradition to see how the Qur'an was perceived by its first readers and its original transmitters. However, there are serious problems in the historiography of early Islam as some sceptical scholars have powerfully challenged the reliability of early traditional sources and have shown how little we can reliably know from traditions (*hadith*) and prophetic biographies (*Sira*) about the life of the Prophet and the context in which the Qur'anic text first appeared. Therefore, I believe it is more reasonable to look exclusively at the Qur'anic text as a resource for discussing this issue. For the sceptical school see Patricia Crone and Michael Allan Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Joseph Schacht, "A Reevaluation of Islamic Traditions," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 2 (1949): 143–54; John Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); John Wansbrough, *The Sectararian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); Andreas Görke, "Prospect and Limits in the Study of the Historical Muḥammad," in *The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam: Essays in Honour of Harald Motzki*, ed. Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Kees Versteegh, and Joas Wagemakers (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 137–51. One of the merits of following the sceptical school in approaching the study of the Qur'an is that one can thereby concentrate on scripture itself rather than reading the text through the lens of the traditional "occasions of revelation" (*asbab al-nuzul*) or its modern historicist equivalents.

¹⁹ Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. A. Guillaume (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 106–7.

²⁰ James A. Beverley, "Muhammad," in *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Oliver Leaman (New York: Routledge, 2006), 420.

These passages also show that the source of learning in general is God. It is from Him that man receives knowledge. Knowledge is owed to Him. God is the teacher of what man did not know, and presumably could not know by himself and through his own ingenuity.

There are many other passages in the Qur'an which can be advanced to prove the dependence of man on divine knowledge. The first sura, the obligatory part of the daily prayer in Islam, depicts Muslims asking God to "guide" them to the straight path (Q 1:6). It seems that according to the Qur'an no one can guide his life without a divine scripture (Q 6:156ff., 37:167ff.). It also seems that the idea of conscience is absent in the Qur'an and independent reason is considered insufficient for guiding men in their lives.²¹ Scripture is presented as "containing guidance for those who are pious" (Q 2:2-4). God condemns those who try to imitate God's words and give their opinions about the state of the afterlife, those who say things of which they have no real knowledge (Q 2:79-80). One can see the same idea in a conversation reported between God and the angels in which the latter declare their inability to name things because they "have knowledge only of what" God has taught them, "the All Knowing and All Wise." In contrast, Adam is shown capable of naming things because God "taught Adam all the names" (Q 2:31-33). The divine origin of human knowledge is also true of Muhammad to whom God taught "the Scripture, wisdom, and things" he did not know (Q 2:151, 2:231, 7:62, 8:60, 12:86, 12:96, 62:2). God reminds Muhammad that He taught him "what was beyond [his] knowledge" (Q 12:102, 26:83, 26:132). God is also said to have given knowledge and wisdom to other prophets and men mentioned in the Qur'an, including Moses (Q 28:14), the Children of Israel (Q 45:16), David, Solomon (Q 27:15, 38:20), Luqman (Q 31:12), and Jesus (Q 43:63). The Qur'an condemns the arrogance of man, because "he sees himself self-sufficient," while it was God who "taught man what he did not know...by the pen" (Q 96:4-7).

The divine origin of Qur'anic knowledge is also manifest in its style: the Qur'an speaks to Mohammed or speaks about him, but Mohammed never speaks in the text, he is silent. Muhammad's detractors deride him as only "an ear!" (Q 9:61). Mohammed's most famous epithet is "messenger" (*rasul*). He is unequivocally *only* a messenger and the originator of the message is God. The word "Qur'an" itself, used for naming the whole body of the text, originally means "reading" or "reciting" and the Qur'an sometimes calls

²¹ Cf. Rom. 2:14-15 and Rémi Brague, *La Loi de Dieu* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 152.

itself a book or writing (*kitab*). In other words, the audience's relationship to the Qur'an is one of a reader or a listener, that is, a passive receiver. The Qur'an is "sent down" (*nuzul*) to men, an expression which in various forms is used more than two hundred times in the text. The Qur'an also calls itself *al-furqan*, the distinguisher, and it is said that God gave Moses "the Book, and the distinguisher, so that you might be guided" (Q 2:53, 25:1). One must say that the Qur'an, which promises the triumph of those who "stand in awe of God" (Q 24:52), is more akin to the Bible that says "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10, Jer. 9:23) than to Socrates's way of life which stressed that "the unexamined life is not worth living." The believer, as he is depicted in the Qur'an and the Bible, lives in fear, anxiety, and trembling (Q 8:2, 70:19) as well as in hope: fear of God, the End of Time, and "imminent torment" (Q 78:40), along with the hope of eternal bliss (Q 76:11–22). The believer does not live the philosophic life of serenity and leisure (*scholē*) beyond fear and hope.²²

Considering these points, one might conclude that according to the Qur'anic perspective the most important knowledge is only available through revelation, while the philosophic life dedicated to curiosity, doubt, and the acquisition of knowledge through reason is at least superfluous and bound to fail or is even characteristic of unbelief. The Qur'an provides man with a knowledge that is beyond his natural capacities that he must simply believe and embrace unconditionally. But is it possible to present a case for the Qur'an as a work of reason which is compatible with or even friendly to the spirit of philosophy?

ARGUMENT FOR REASON

The critical point with respect to any revelation is its pretension to truth. But how can one determine the truth of Qur'anic revelation? How can one evaluate Muhammad's claim to be the Prophet of God? The usual, traditional answer to the question of how to establish a genuine revelation was by miracles. If, in the case of some revelation which claims to be genuine, we establish that a certain phenomenon in its favor is miraculous we can establish its genuineness. This means that in the case of the Qur'an one must investigate whether there is any miracle which proves its divine origin. Traditionally the Qur'an itself is presented as Muhammad's highest miracle. This claim is based on some passages in the Qur'an in which God demands the unbelievers who

²² Strauss, "Progress or Return?," 109.

“have doubts about the revelation” sent to Muhammad to “produce a single sura like it”; God is certain that they cannot do this (Q 2:23–24, 10:38). God assures the unbelievers that even if “all mankind and jinn came together to produce something like this Qur’an, they could not produce anything like it” (Q 17:88). God tells us that any imitation of the Qur’an would have inconsistencies, while there is no inconsistency in the Qur’an (Q 4:82). However, what is actually meant by these claims is not as clear as one might think. God challenges the unbelievers to bring a “similar” sura; but it is not clear what “similar” means.²³ Does it mean a text as eloquent, concise, or fluent as the Qur’an? But such qualities seem to be a matter of taste: some might find other speeches, poems, or rhymed prose more beautiful than the Qur’an²⁴ or even question the Qur’an’s literary value.²⁵ The Qur’an’s claim to be inimitable by the Arabs, a people famous for its poetic genius, is puzzling to say the least; it seems that something other than pure literary quality is meant here, and later generations simply invented the story of the Qur’an’s superior literary characteristics to make some sense of this claim. In other words, the Qur’an might mean that its *content* is superior to any other writing’s. However, this also depends on what we find in the Qur’an and our evaluation of its worth.

Apart from the Qur’an’s miraculous character, is there any other miracle which can vouch for the truth of Islamic revelation? Muhammad’s life and his doings, as the mouthpiece of revelation, are understandably crucial here. The Qur’an accepts the concept of miracles and reports many miracles associated with Abraham (Q 2:260, 21:68–70), Moses (Q 17:101, 26:63–68) and Jesus (Q 2:87, 3:46, 5:110–14). In Moses’s confrontation with the Pharaoh, Moses calls his miracles “something convincing” (Q 26:30). Unbelievers also recognize the importance of miracles for establishing the truth of revelation and there are numerous Qur’anic passages in which the unbelievers demand miracles from Muhammad (e.g., Q 2:118; 3:183, 4:153, 6:7–8, 6:37, 6:91, 7:105, 11:12, 11:53, 13:7, 13:27, 14:10, 15:7–14, 20:133, 21:5, 26:154, 29:50). There is even a somewhat amusing passage in which God challenges the unbelievers to produce evidence for their unbelief (Q 27:64)! In a word, the Qur’an unequivocally recognizes the decisive importance of miracles for identifying

²³ This point is also made by Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi. See Abu Hatim Al-razi, *The Proofs of Prophecy*, trans. Tarif Khalidi (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2011), 167.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, ed. Carl Niemeyer (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 64; Maxime Rodinson, *Muhammad: Prophet of Islam* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2002), 92; Theodor Nöldeke, *The History of the Qur’an*, ed. Wolfgang H. Behn (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 90.

a genuine revelation and deciding whether a scripture is indeed the Word of God. However, this recognition is also clearly contrasted with the lack of miracles in the case of Muhammad. Muslim historians have attributed many other miracles to the Prophet of Islam, for example that he split the moon or was one night transported to Jerusalem.²⁶ However, these alleged miracles are either entirely absent from the Qur'an and depend wholly on Traditions, or the Qur'anic passages on which they are based are very ambiguous. In fact, the Qur'an's account of Muhammad's prophethood is clearly in contradiction with traditional accounts which attribute miracles to the Prophet of Islam.²⁷ The Qur'an denies that Muhammad has performed any miracle (Q 6:35, 6:50, 6:109, 15:7–14, 26:4, 29:50, 30:58, 41:14) and argues that it is God who decides whether miracles should be produced or not. It also reminds the reader and the Prophet that miracles were not effective in the past and many people abandoned prophets despite their miracles (Q 3:126, 6:7–8, 6:109, 17:59, 28:48, 35:25). The Qur'an rejects the unbelievers' request for miracles comparable to those "signs...given to Moses" by reminding them that despite those miracles Moses was not believed by his followers (Q 28:48).²⁸

Why is it that, unlike other prophets in the Qur'an, Muhammad does not perform miracles? It is said in the Qur'an that "there was a Scripture for every age," and in former times prophets performed miracles (Q 13:38). Does this mean that the age of miracles has passed? Are Muhammad's "modern" contemporaries less open to the possibility of, and therefore less likely to believe in, miracles? Are they living in the postbiblical "disenchanted world"? Whatever one might think about these suggestions, there is clearly a general push towards a remarkable demystification of prophecy in the Qur'an. As was

²⁶ For a traditional list see Al-razi, *The Proofs of Prophecy*, 145ff.

²⁷ There is a passage in Judah Halevi's *Kuzari* in which a Muslim scholar argues that "miracles have been performed by [Muhammad], but they have not been offered as proof for accepting his Law" (1:7). According to this participant in the dialogue, the only miracle which proves the genuineness of Muhammad's mission is the Qur'an. The king of Khazars refuses to accept the miraculous character of the Qur'an because "a non-Arab like myself will not be able to recognize its miraculous and extraordinary character" (1:6). One should bear in mind that this claim is made in a work written in Arabic! It is possible that Halevi is trying to make the same point about Islam that I am making here, that to claim that the language of the Qur'an is miraculous is puzzling and Muhammad did not base his prophethood on miracles. (Quotations are from Barry S. Kogan's unpublished translation.)

²⁸ The passage reminds us of Edward Gibbon who made this ironical comment: "The contemporaries of Moses and Joshua had beheld with careless indifference the most amazing miracles. Under the pressure of every calamity, the belief of those miracles has preserved the Jews of a later period from the universal contagion of idolatry; and in contradiction to every known principle of the human mind, that singular people seems to have yielded a stronger and more ready assent to the traditions of their remote ancestors than to the evidence of their own senses" (Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* [London: Harper & Brothers, 1835], 1:178).

mentioned, the Qur'an does not deny the miracles of the previous prophets, however, it insists that the prophets in general and Muhammad in particular are nothing but human beings. Repeatedly Jesus is identified as the "son of Mary" (Q 4:157, 5:17, 43:57, 61:6) to emphatically bring it to mind that Jesus was only a mortal man and not the Son of God. It is said that Jesus and Mary "both ate food" like other mortals (Q 5:75). Muhammad is also described as "only a mortal like you" (Q 41:6, 6:50, 6:91, 7:63, 7:69, 7:188), apparently not elevated above human weaknesses. The ordinary character of Muhammad's life mentioned in the Qur'an is quite remarkable. Even the unbelievers were surprised that according to the Qur'an the prophets are "men like us" (Q 14:10). It is not therefore surprising that later generations of Muslims tried to find extraordinary things in the Prophet's life, as if even they could not easily accept this aspect of Muhammad's mission and felt something was lacking.

The absence of an appeal to miracles does not mean that the Qur'an takes belief for granted. Instead, it tries to justify itself and to convince its readers; it is an *argumentative* writing. It argues for the unicity of God by saying that if there existed several deities the whole world would have perished because of their conflict (Q 21:21–22, 23:91). It justifies charity (*zakat*) by explaining that it prevents the accumulation of wealth and contributes towards its partial redistribution among the Muslim community (Q 9:60, 59:7). God refutes the unbelievers' denial of the possibility of Resurrection by reminding them of their birth (Q 36:77–83). One is often struck by the amount of space dedicated to disputation and polemical apologetic. The Qur'an "regularly addresses actual or implicit antagonists."²⁹ Many have found "full arguments with premises and conclusions, antecedents and consequents, constructions *a fortiori*, commands supported by justification, conclusions produced by rule-based reasoning, comparisons, contrasts, and many other patterns."³⁰ From the polemical nature of the Qur'an, Wansborough concludes that the Qur'an was born in highly sectarian conditions.³¹ One might question Wansborough's conclusion because the same thing can be said about the New Testament but one rarely finds such an argumentative spirit in the latter.

²⁹ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "The Construction of a Qur'anic Commonplace," in *Myths, Historical Archetypes and Symbolic Figures in Arabic Literature: Towards a New Hermeneutic Approach*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999), 163; George Anastaplo, "Islamic Thought: The Koran," in *But Not Philosophy: Seven Introductions to Non-Western Thought*, ed. George Anastaplo (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002), 182.

³⁰ Rosalind Ward Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'an* (London: Routledge, 2004), x.

³¹ Wansborough, *The Sectarian Milieu*.

Furthermore, this argumentative nature of the Qur'an is clearly related to the absence of miracles, while in the New Testament miracles of Jesus abound. Muhammad obstinately refrains from relying on any personal miracle or extraordinary sign to prove his prophecy.³² The Qur'an asks the Prophet to "call to the way of your God," not by performing miracles, but "with wisdom [*hikma*] and kind exhortation [*mou'ezeh*] and disputation [*jadal*]" (Q 16:125).³³ It seems that the Qur'an intends to convince its readers of the truth of its claims *by its constant appeal to reason*, that is, by relying on natural and verifiable statements characteristic of philosophy rather than by relying on supernatural miracles to support indemonstrable and unverifiable assertions of revelation. The Qur'an asks the unbelievers to observe the natural world and argues that these observations, coupled with reasoning and reflection, would lead one to accept its message. It seems that the main argument for the truth of the Qur'an is its reasonableness.³⁴

The Qur'an replaces the experience of miracles with the experience of Creation. The amazement derived from the experience of nature and its intricacies is advanced as the proof of the truth of the Qur'anic revelation. In innumerable verses the Qur'an depicts nature and its complex details in order to prove the truth of Muhammad's revelation. It is as if the Qur'an believes

³² There might be a link between the absence of miracles and the composition of the Qur'an. The order of the Qur'anic text, or more precisely the apparent lack thereof, has preoccupied the mind of readers for centuries. However, an observation might lead us to suspect that there is some order in the current arrangement. Although the number of verses differs slightly from one edition to another, according to the most common view there are 6236 verses in the Qur'an. This means that the central verses are 186th and 187th of sura 26, entitled "The Poets." These two verses are part of a dialogue between the unbelievers and the Prophet in which the unbelievers call the latter "nothing but a man like us," a poet. They demand that he perform some miracles to prove his divine mission. Does this mean that the question of Muhammad's lack of miracles was the "central" preoccupation of the original editors of the Qur'an? Did they believe that this is the most important teaching of the Islamic revelation? For observations about the meaning of the current arrangement see also Anastaplo, "Islamic Thought: The Koran," 209n58; Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), xxviii. For other examples of possible numerological passages with esoteric meaning see Q 74:30–31 and also the discussions about the numerological importance of the "abbreviated letters" (*muqattiat*) placed at the beginning of certain suras.

³³ Averroes interpreted this verse as God commanding the Prophet to teach men differently: some by philosophy, some by preaching, and some by dialectic. The same terminology was used by Muslim philosophers to describe Aristotle's classification of speeches as demonstrative, rhetorical, and dialectical. See Averroes, *The Book of the Decisive Treatise determining the Connection between the Law and Wisdom*, trans. Charles E. Butterworth (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2001), 8, Müller 7; Arthur J. Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2013), 15. According to Fakhry, it was this command "which, following the period of conquest, was historically at the basis of the debates with Christians" (Majid Fakhry, "Philosophy and the Qur'an," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe [Leiden: Brill, 2001–6], 4:71).

³⁴ Muhammad Abu-Hamdiyyah, *The Qur'an: An Introduction* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2002), 36.

that men's amazement before nature would lead them to faith. It repeatedly argues that "there truly are signs in the creation of the heavens and earth, and in the alternation of night and day, for those with understanding...who reflect on the creation of the heavens and earth" (Q 3:190–91, 2:164, 6:97, 7:57, 10:67). Men are asked to "reflect," "reason," and "observe" (Q 13:3, 13:4, 14:25, 22:73, 24: 39–40, 25:50). It seems that for the Qur'an the faculties of observation and reasoning are the only ones needed for discerning the "right way" and accepting Islam. To the Arabs and many other people who do not believe in the Resurrection of the Dead, the Qur'an gives arguments from history, nature, and logic (Q 22:5–10, 36:76–83, 56:47–96). It is in fact *the* Qur'anic method to argue with its readers. Apparently, it does not refuse to establish its claim before the tribunal of human reason, it even demands it. To Muhammad's supposedly Jewish and Christian detractors who asked for his miraculous signs of prophecy, questioned the truth of his mission, and made mention of his ordinary life (Q 20:133, 25:7–9, 30:58), the Qur'an regularly responds that the creation of earth and heaven, what grows in nature, the generation of living beings, the existence of male and female, and other natural phenomena are signs enough for the truth of his prophecy (Q 26:6, 30:17ff.). The Qur'an is preoccupied with natural phenomena and generation, and one can observe a process of substituting natural phenomena for miracles in it. These phenomena are not miraculous; they are not supernatural but instead manifestations of God in the natural world. It is as if in the Qur'an reflection on and observation of nature are the equivalent of witnessing miracles. The same word (*aya*, "sign") that is used for natural phenomena (Q 57:17, 30:22ff.) is also used for miracles (Q 7:73, 17:101, 26:67, 26:121, 26:154, 26:158), and even for the verses of the Qur'an (Q 28:59). The Qur'an goes so far as to call the natural knowledge of bees "revelation" (*wahy*): "And your lord revealed to the bee, saying 'Build yourselves houses in the mountains and trees and what people construct'" (Q 16:68). If the natural knowledge of the bees is called a revelation, one might ask, are the revelations sent down to Muhammad also a kind of *natural* knowledge?

HUMAN KNOWLEDGE IN THE QUR'ANIC STORIES

It is not only from explicit passages in the Qur'an that one can discover its view of natural knowledge, the knowledge characteristic of philosophy. The same is true of the Bible, which above all educates the readers and transmits its message through its many stories. One biblical story that is particularly important for our study is the story of the Fall. It has been argued that the story of the Fall in the Bible is the clearest critique of the freestanding and

autonomous knowledge characteristic of philosophy.³⁵ Through this story, the Bible confronts us with the fundamental alternative to the autonomous activity of philosophy, namely, obedience to God and His revelation. In the biblical telling, there are two parts of the story of the Fall that are particularly important for this antiphilosophical interpretation: First, the forbidden tree is specifically called “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” and God warns Adam that if he eats from it, he “will certainly die.” Second, the serpent of the Bible tempts Adam and Eve by saying that if they eat from the tree “your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 2:17, 3:5). But the Qur’anic version of the story of the Fall has significant differences from its biblical counterpart and gives a different account of these two aspects of the story. In the Qur’anic version, God commands Adam and Eve not to go “near this tree or you shall become wrongdoers.” The Qur’an does not mention any link between the forbidden tree and knowledge; the tree is not even named. Furthermore, Satan in the Qur’an tempts Adam and Eve by saying that “your Lord only forbade you this tree to prevent you becoming angels or immortals” (Q 7:19–20). In other words, the Qur’anic Adam and Eve are not tempted by the prospect of acquiring knowledge; they are misled because of their desire to become angels or immortals. In Genesis, the original disobedience of man is due to his desire to acquire the knowledge of good and evil. The grounds of his disobedience consisted in gaining autonomous knowledge that man possesses by himself, independently of God. In the Qur’anic version of the story a critique of autonomous human knowledge is not implied and the motivation behind the original disobedience is not the desire for knowledge. The critique of autonomous rational inquiry is not the theme of the Qur’anic story.

However, one might argue that the Qur’anic story of Moses and Khidr depicts the antagonism of reason and revelation in the Muslim scripture. In this story (Q 18:65–82), Moses meets “one of Our servants,” a man to whom “We had given knowledge of Our own.” This man is not named but Muslim traditions identify him as Khidr. Moses asks for permission to accompany Khidr so that he can learn what he “has been taught” by God. At first Khidr resists but owing to Moses’s persistence, Khidr accepts on the condition that Moses not question him about what he does. On their way Khidr damages a boat, kills a young man, and repairs a wall. Each time Moses protests and asks for the reason for Khidr’s surprising acts and each time Khidr reminds

³⁵ Strauss, “On the Interpretation of Genesis,” 372–73; Leon Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 51; Robert Sacks, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Lewiston, ME: Edwin Mellen, 1990), 65.

Moses of his promise not to question him. On the third time Khidr loses patience and tells him that they should part company. But he first explains “the meaning of the things” Moses could not bear with patience. The message of the story seems to be that one must follow God’s servant without questioning his actions. It is the most important anecdote that can be provided as evidence of the opposition of the Qur’an to the spirit of philosophy. Supposedly, according to this story, a Muslim is meant to live in perfect obedience and not seek the knowledge of good and evil himself. However, the moral of the story is not entirely clear. It is remarkable that even Moses, one of the prophets, or in fact *the* prophet of God in the Qur’an (mentioned five hundred and two times, more than any other prophet) who was given “wisdom” by God (Q 26:21), lacks the knowledge accessible only to people like Khidr. In other words, the truly divine knowledge of Khidr seems to be different from the wisdom of prophets like Moses, and if a divine man like Moses lacks such knowledge, how can one expect ordinary human beings to possess it? Are we meant to imitate Khidr, or Moses?

There is one other Qur’anic story which also manifests the difference between the biblical view of philosophy and the Qur’anic perspective: in the first chapter of Genesis the divinity of the heavenly bodies, one of the most widespread ideas of the philosophical cosmology, is denied.³⁶ The depreciation of the heaven and the denial of the divinity of the heavenly bodies is also present in the Qur’an: “Do not bow down in worship to the sun or the moon, but bow down to God who created them” (Q 41:37). However, the idea that the heavenly bodies are not divine is presented in the Bible as one of the things that God by His grace has *revealed exclusively* to His chosen people: “And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven” (Deut. 4:19). In other words, this biblical knowledge, the depreciation of heaven, is not based on any argument: it is simply *asserted* and we are simply *told* that heaven is not divine. On the contrary, there are a few passages in the Qur’an which seem to encourage cosmological contemplation. The God of the Qur’an swears by “the raised canopy” (i.e., the sky) (Q 52:5) and by “the positions of the stars” and He tells the reader that it is “a mighty oath, if you only knew” (Q 56:75). Furthermore, the idea of the divinity of the heavenly bodies is refuted in the Qur’an by *arguments* and through the story of Abraham. The latter is depicted as

³⁶ Strauss, “On the Interpretation of Genesis,” 369.

engaged in cosmological observation and contemplation of heaven. Observing the setting of the sun, the moon, and the stars Abraham concludes that they cannot be divine and he therefore ascends from worshiping the heavenly bodies to monotheism.³⁷ In other words, Abraham in the Qur'an arrives at the conclusion that the heavenly bodies are not divine through the use of his autonomous reason (Q 6:76–79).

THE QUR'AN AND ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

The above observations lead us to question the status of the Qur'an as a simple work of revelation and make that status quite ambiguous: it is not uniquely based on supranational knowledge and its relationship with human reason and the philosophic way of life is vague. In the history of Islamic thought many thinkers struggled to clarify the relationship between the Qur'an and the tradition of philosophy coming from the Greeks. Significantly, the nonmiraculous character of the Qur'an, its argumentative character, and its ambiguous relationship with natural reason have put their imprint on their efforts. Before the emergence of Islamic philosophy, the debate about the relationship between reason and revelation appeared in the conflict between the so-called traditionalist and rationalist theologians. The rationalists have often been charged by their traditionalist opponents with holding the view that men do not need revelation, that everything can be known through reason.³⁸ It seems that at least some of the rationalists believed that all the knowledge available in scripture is also available to unassisted human reason (provided it is given time and applies itself to knowing them) and that there is nothing essentially suprarational about Qur'anic teachings; although it is difficult to find such a radical position explicitly stated in their surviving works.³⁹ However, in treating this subject, it is important to take the problem

³⁷ The reasoning seems to be this: the celestial bodies are chained to a prescribed course of movement and lack the freedom characteristic of a superior Being. Cf. Kass, *Beginning of Wisdom*, 35, and Genesis 2. In the Bible, this fact is depicted or hinted at by *God*.

³⁸ Richard C. Martin, Mark Woodward, and Dwi S. Atmaja, *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), 12, 75, 187–88; George F. Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 18; Oliver Leaman, *An Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 147; Umar F. Abd-Allah, "Theological Dimensions of Islamic Law," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 250.

³⁹ "Most Mu'tazilite theologians...assumed that everything is available to the unassisted human mind, provided the human mind is given time and applies itself to knowing them. They argued that prophecy and revelation are necessary because humans need to be instructed about things required for their well-being in this world and the next. Although some humans could know these things if

of persecution into account. It would be unreasonable to believe that if any thinker held such radical views he would openly advertise them. In any case the traditionalists firmly denied the radical rationalistic view. Their position is best presented in the comments of Malik ibn Anas on the Qur'anic passages which speak of God "sitting upon the throne" (e.g., Q 7:54, 20:5). Reportedly Malik said that "the sitting is known, its modality is unknown. Belief in it is an obligation and raising questions regarding it is a heresy."⁴⁰ In other words, the knowledge provided by the Qur'an, according to Malik, is not accessible to human reason and must be accepted solely on faith. This approach ultimately led to an extreme form of literalism, found for instance in Ibn Taymiyyah. Reportedly the latter said during a sermon that "God comes down from heaven to earth, just as I am coming down now," upon which he came down from his pulpit.⁴¹

The reign of rationalist theologians was quite brief. However, with the rise of the systematic tradition of classical Islamic philosophy, the idea that the Qur'an contained rational knowledge gained a new impetus. One of the most important figures to discuss the relationship between the Qur'an and reason was al-Kindi. He discusses this question in two works in which he explicitly quotes and discusses Qur'anic verses. The first is *The Prostration of the Outermost Body* in which he comments on the beginning of Sura ar-Rahman (Q 55:6). In this sura the stars are depicted as prostrating themselves; commenting on this passage, al-Kindi argues that the Qur'an may be "understood wholly through reasonable deductions"⁴² and shows how this Qur'anic passage, if read figuratively, is in harmony with philosophical cosmology. He discusses the same subject in *On the Quantity of Aristotle's Books* where he makes contrasts between the human and divine sciences. According to al-Kindi, human sciences are acquired through study and effort and are lower in rank than divine science which can be acquired without study or effort and in no time. The knowledge of the prophets is an example of divine science; they know through

given sufficient time and mental power and application, there was at the time of the coming down of revelation a disparity between what humans knew and what they needed to know. What humans know at any time is subject to a great many accidents, and in any case not all humans know what they need to know well enough to act upon it. Revelation is an act of grace that removes these accidental shortcomings rather than an imparting of information about things whose very nature is such that the unassisted human mind, by its very nature, has no access to them" (Muhsin Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001], 45).

⁴⁰ Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (London: Longman, 1983), xvii.

⁴¹ Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam*, 22.

⁴² Al-Kindi, *The Philosophical Works of Al-Kindi*, trans. Peter Pormann and Peter Adamson (Karachi: OUP Pakistan, 2012), 175, Rashed & Jolivet 177.

the will of God who bestows upon them this knowledge “without study, effort, or inquiry, without the methods of mathematics or logic, and without time.”⁴³ To elucidate his point al-Kindi gives the example of a Qur’anic passage in which God argues for the possibility of the Resurrection of the Dead (Q 36:79-82) and contends that the philosophers cannot provide an argument similar to the Qur’an’s “in brevity, clarity, unerringness and comprehensiveness.”⁴⁴ However, he then proceeds to give a detailed philosophical explanation of the meaning of the Qur’anic passage. What is interesting in these two cases is that in both al-Kindi seems to be saying that there is nothing in the Qur’an inherently inaccessible to human reason and philosophy: the human and divine sciences both arrive at the same knowledge, and this is why there seems to be an agreement among commentators that al-Kindi believed in a perfect agreement of philosophy and revelation.⁴⁵ However, three points should be mentioned here. First, how can al-Kindi call the Qur’anic knowledge clear and comprehensive when one needs an elaborate and complex philosophical commentary to explain the figurative meaning of words in a short passage? Second, it seems that al-Kindi is aware of some conflict between the Qur’anic view of the Creation and the philosophic idea of the eternity of the world, although he only alludes to this problem.⁴⁶ Third, there remains the problem of the necessity of revelation: if the Qur’an and philosophy both teach the same truth, why do men need revelation? This is a major criticism which Alfarabi also puts into the mouth of a group of theologians: “were revelation to provide a human being only with what he knew and could perceive by his intellect... people...would have no need for prophecy or revelation.”⁴⁷ As we shall see, later Muslim philosophers struggled with this problem. As for al-Kindi, his response seems to be that the Qur’an is more clear and comprehensive than philosophic arguments, although as I mentioned one can doubt that this response is entirely convincing.

⁴³ Ibid., 286, Guidi & Walzer 372–73. The same point is also made in *On the Reason Why the Higher Atmosphere Is Cold* (ibid., 210–11, Abu Rida 93).

⁴⁴ Al-Kindi, *Philosophical Works*, 287, Guidi & Walzer 373.

⁴⁵ Peter Adamson, *Al-Kindi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 44; Richard Walzer, *Greek into Arabic: Essays on Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 196; William Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), 40.

⁴⁶ Al-Kindi, *Philosophical Works*, 287–88, Guidi & Walzer 373–74; Charles E. Butterworth, “Al-Kindi and the Beginning of Islamic Political Philosophy,” in *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Muhsin S. Mahdi*, ed. Charles E. Butterworth (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 30–31.

⁴⁷ Alfarabi, “Enumeration of the Sciences,” 81, V.5, Uthman Amin 109.

While al-Kindi quotes Qur'anic verses and explains their philosophic content, Alfarabi, arguably the most influential Islamic philosopher, systematically avoids speaking about Islam and prefers to present his views on religion in general.⁴⁸ However, the way he uses traditional Islamic concepts like “the trustworthy spirit” (*al-ruh al-amin*) and “the holy spirit” (*ruh al-qudus*)⁴⁹ and his description of the virtuous regime and its ruler who receives revelation⁵⁰ and whose tradition is followed by later generations⁵¹ show the Islamic context of his thought.⁵² What is remarkable in Alfarabi's view of the reason-revelation distinction is that by introducing the concept of the philosopher-prophet-ruler in his political philosophy, it seems that he practically denies any difference between the knowledge of philosopher and the prophetic knowledge of the Qur'an. According to Alfarabi, the ruler who perfects his rational faculty enters into contact with the active intellect, the angel of revelation: “he is the one of whom it ought [*yanbaghi*] to be said that he receives revelation.”⁵³ Alfarabi also imagines the possibility of a prophet without philosophical qualifications, although it is not clear whether this is only a kind of thought experiment—as Mahdi puts it, “a psychological distinction...useful for understanding the nature of both prophecy and philosophy”—or a real possibility.⁵⁴ At any rate, even the second account would not necessarily mean that the unphilosophical prophet has access to knowledge that is in principle unavailable to philosophers. More importantly, the dominant image of revelation in Alfarabi remains the philosopher-prophet-ruler, the “perfect human being.”⁵⁵ It seems that Alfarabi's view of prophecy

⁴⁸ It seems that by avoiding Islam specifically Alfarabi suggests that for his virtuous regime the particularities of religion are not important: “it may be possible for the religions of virtuous nations and virtuous cities to differ even if they all pursue the very same happiness” (Alfarabi, “Political Regime,” in *The Political Writings*, vol. 2, *Political Regime and Summary of Plato's “Laws,”* trans. Charles E. Butterworth [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015], 75, sec. 90, Fauzi Najjar 86).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 30, sec. 3, Fauzi Najjar 32. Cf. Q 2:87, 2:253, 5:113, 16:102, 26:193.

⁵⁰ Alfarabi, “Political Regime,” 69, sec. 80, Fauzi Najjar 79; Alfarabi, “Book of Religion,” in *The Political Writings: “Selected Aphorisms” and Other Texts*, 111–12, sec. 26–27, Muhsin Mahdi 64.

⁵¹ Alfarabi, “Selected Aphorisms,” in *The Political Writings: “Selected Aphorisms” and Other Texts*, 37, aph. 58, Fauzi Najjar 66. This is the idea behind the Islamic concept of Sunna, the traditions and practices of the Prophet that are considered models to be followed by Muslims.

⁵² For a discussion of other Islamic concepts which inform Alfarabi's thought see Majid Fakhry, *Al-Farabi, Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism: His Life, Works and Influence* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002), 101–17.

⁵³ Alfarabi, “Political Regime,” 69, sec. 80, Fauzi Najjar 79. Cf. *ibid.*, 30, sec. 3, Fauzi Najjar 32: “Of the active intellect, it ought [*yanbaghi*] to be said that it is the trustworthy spirit and the holy spirit”; and *ibid.*, 29, sec. 2, Fauzi Najjar 31: “The first [cause] is what ought [*yanbaghi*] to be believed to be the deity.”

⁵⁴ Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*, 135.

⁵⁵ See the description of “the king in truth” in Alfarabi, “Selected Aphorisms,” 37, aph. 58, Fauzi Najjar 66.

is that which Maimonides identifies as the opinion of *falasifa*: “prophecy is a certain perfection in the nature of man. This perfection is not achieved in any individual from among men except after a training.” Maimonides distinguishes this position from that of others (apparently traditionalists) who consider prophecy to be a power given by God to any man He wishes regardless of his intellectual acumen.⁵⁶ In the same vein, for Alfarabi, a prophet must be a trained philosopher who has perfected all aspects of philosophy: “the first ruler of the virtuous city must already have thorough cognizance of theoretical philosophy; for he cannot understand anything pertaining to God’s, may He be exalted, governance of the world so as to follow it *except* from that source.”⁵⁷ He goes so far as to say that “any religion in which the first type of opinions [i.e., the theoretical opinions] do not comprise what a human being can ascertain either from himself or by demonstration and in which there is no likeness of anything he can ascertain in one of these two ways is an errant religion.”⁵⁸ In other words, it seems that for Alfarabi, all genuine religious knowledge is accessible to human reason, and the truth of the theoretical views of any given religion should be ascertainable by human reason; there is nothing essentially suprarational about the knowledge derived from revelation.

Taken literally, Alfarabi’s understanding of prophecy amounts to saying that Muhammad was a philosopher, or as Averroes puts it, “every prophet is a sage [*hakim*].”⁵⁹ As I mentioned, Alfarabi is curiously silent about Islam and its relationship with the philosophical tradition originated by the Greeks. However, he writes that “religion is an imitation of philosophy”⁶⁰ and makes the curious remark that “philosophy is prior to religion in time.”⁶¹ He also traces one of the causes of the conflict between philosophy and religion to the fact that sometimes followers of a religion are ignorant of the *philosophic origin* of their religion.⁶² He thereby gives the impression that he believes a

⁵⁶ Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), II.32; Al-Kindi, *Philosophical Works*, 286, Guidi & Walzer 372.

⁵⁷ Alfarabi, “Book of Religion,” 113, sec. 27, Muhsin Mahdi 66. For “the first ruler” as the Prophet see *ibid.*, 111–12, sec. 26–27, Muhsin Mahdi 64.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 97, sec. 4, Muhsin Mahdi 46.

⁵⁹ Averroes, *Tahafut Al-Tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence)*, trans. Simon Van Den Bergh, 3rd repr. ed. (London: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2008), 361, Bouygues 583. Sometimes the Qur’an reads like a work written by a bookish person: “on that Day, We shall roll up the skies as a writer rolls up his scrolls” (Q 21:104, 52:2, 96:3–5).

⁶⁰ Alfarabi, “The Attainment of Happiness,” in *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 44, sec. 55, Hyderabad 40.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 45, sec. 55, Hyderabad 41.

⁶² Alfarabi, *Al-Farabi’s Book of Letters (Kitāb Al-Ḥurūf): Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, ed.

philosophical tradition has had some influence on the formation of Islam. It is not clear whether he has something like the Platonic influence on Christianity in mind⁶³ or he is making a much more radical claim, that Muhammad himself was influenced by a philosophic tradition. In this regard, it might also be significant that Alfarabi's major political works (*The Virtuous City* and *Political Regime*) bear little resemblance to philosophic writings; they consist of statements about God, world, and society without any trace of argument or demonstration. Is Alfarabi imitating in his time what he believed Muhammad did before him? As *the* representative of the Platonic tradition, Alfarabi must have been familiar with Plato's depiction of ancient philosophers who used "arts of concealment" and disguised themselves with different garbs including that of prophecy.⁶⁴ Did Alfarabi believe Muhammad was an Arab philosopher who concealed his teaching under the guise of a revealed religion? It is not impossible that Muslim Platonists saw some parallelisms between the life of Muhammad and that of Socrates, the archphilosopher, even though Muhammad, as he is depicted in traditional biographies, was not of course a philosopher. However, there are a few things in the Qur'an that some readers might interpret as marks of philosophy. Apart from the argumentative nature of the Qur'an, its cosmological themes, and Muhammad's lack of miracles, there is also the fact that in a society where people identify themselves with their forefathers, Muhammad regularly criticizes the ancestors of the unbelievers as misguided people and asks their descendants to forsake their errant customs and beliefs. Unbelievers often justify their idolatry by saying that they are following the ways of their fathers (Q 2:170, 5:104, 7:28, 7:70, 21:53, 23:24, 26:74), and criticize Muhammad for his effort in turning them away from the faith of their fathers (Q 10:78, 11:62, 14:10, 26:137; cf. Moses in Q 26:26, 28:36, 43:22). The Qur'anic critique of the ancestral resembles the philosophic rejection of the ancestral in favor of the good.⁶⁵ Muhammad's relationship with the youth might also remind someone of the accusation brought against Socrates of corrupting the youth.⁶⁶

Muhsin Mahdi (Beirut: Dar El-Mashreq, 1969), 155, sec. 149.

⁶³ Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*, 221. For a version of this theory that argues that the Hebrew Bible was written in accordance with the detailed instructions found in Plato's *Laws* see Russell E. Gmirkin, *Plato and the Creation of the Hebrew Bible* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016).

⁶⁴ Plato, *Protagoras* 316d4–317a; *Sophist* 216c5–d8.

⁶⁵ Aristotle, *Politics* 1269a1–3.

⁶⁶ Plato, *Apology* 24b–26a. Most of Muhammad's early followers were the youth of Mecca. It is reported that one of Muhammad's followers even offered to go and kill his father who was one of the Meccan leaders inimical to the Prophet (Rodinson, *Muhammad: Prophet of Islam*, 184).

However, the question that now imposes itself is: did Muslim philosophers like Alfarabi really believe that Muhammad was a philosopher?⁶⁷ Dealing with such a question, as I mentioned, one must keep in mind that revealing one's heretical views in closed societies amounts to putting one's life in danger. Persecution has understandably forced philosophers to conceal their unorthodox views and also to defend their activity by any means necessary. For instance, Alfarabi tries to provide an Eastern lineage for philosophy to avoid the charge of following an alien type of practice coming from the heathen Greeks.⁶⁸ One other way by which Muslim philosophers tried to justify their fascination with the foreign discipline of philosophy was by invoking many passages in the Qur'an in which wisdom (*hikma*) is mentioned, sometimes alongside scripture (e.g., Q 3:81). Naming wisdom and scripture together gives the impression that they both make the same knowledge available to human beings, that they are two parallel ways to acquire the same knowledge. Sometimes wisdom is presented as a quality of God (Q 2:240, 2:260, 3:6, 3:18, 3:126, 4:11, 4:17, 4:26, 4:92, 4:104, 4:111, 4:165, 4:170, 5:38, 6:83, 8:10, 24:18, 24:58, 27:6) and sometimes as that of prophets. For instance, Sura 31 of the Qur'an entitled Luqman is dedicated to a prophet known for his *hikma*.⁶⁹ In the Qur'an wisdom is often described as a unique blessing (e.g., Q 2:269). This same Qur'anic term (*hikma*) was used by Muslim philosophers to mean philosophy. To call Muhammad a philosopher, a *hakim*, might have been a way to legitimize philosophy in a hostile environment—but we must suspend our judgment on this question for now.

Averroes's *Decisive Treatise* represents the most important effort to legitimize philosophy in Islam. Averroes argues that the activity of philosophy is not prohibited in Islam. He defines philosophy as the "reflection upon existing things and consideration of them insofar as they are an indication of the Artisan."⁷⁰ Pointing to numerous verses in which believers are commanded to reflect about the world, Averroes concludes that the study of philosophy is commanded by God. He also maintains the parity of religious and philosophic knowledge and argues that philosophic knowledge is in harmony with religious knowledge. For him what is set down in the Qur'an is in perfect harmony with the results of the demonstrative reflection

⁶⁷ Brague, *La Loi de Dieu*, 198.

⁶⁸ Alfarabi, "The Attainment of Happiness," 43, sec. 53, Hyderabad 38. Cf. the remarkable defense of philosophy in Al-Kindi, *Philosophical Works*, 11–12, Rashed & Jolivet 12–15.

⁶⁹ Nasr, "Quran and Hadith as Source and Inspiration," 73.

⁷⁰ Averroes, *Decisive Treatise*, 1, Müller 1.

characteristic of philosophy. In the event of an apparent conflict between the Qur'anic teaching and philosophy, Averroes contends that the philosopher must engage in a figurative interpretation of scripture owing to "the difference in people's innate dispositions and the variance in their innate capacities for assent." Recognizing this, the Qur'an addresses different people with different styles.⁷¹ According to Averroes, people vary with respect to the degree of "assent" they are able to achieve. Some assent by demonstrative, some by dialectical, and some by rhetorical statements⁷² and Averroes thinks that the Qur'an addresses different people by these different methods. In other words, Averroes distinguishes between the few who are capable of philosophy and the majority who need religion; the latter lack the rational capacity needed to go beyond the surface meaning of scripture to discover the inner meanings of the Qur'an which is compatible with the discoveries of philosophy.⁷³ What sets Averroes apart from al-Kindi is the fact that the former argues for the superiority of philosophic demonstration to dialectical and rhetorical statements of the Qur'an. Therefore, the necessity of the Qur'an is not based, as in the case of al-Kindi, on its unquestionable clarity and comprehensiveness, but on the fact that it makes the truth accessible to those who cannot know it through demonstration. However, if Averroes is right that the Qur'anic knowledge is an inferior version of philosophic knowledge, one might doubt that it can be of much use to philosophers *as a source of knowledge* as distinguished from *a useful political instrument*, a civil religion in the proper sense of the term necessary for the education of the many.⁷⁴ In his refutation

⁷¹ Ibid., 9. This idea is also found in others: "Since it is difficult for the public to understand these things in themselves and the way they exist, instructing them about these things is sought by other ways—and those are the ways of representation. So these things are represented to each group or nation by things of which they are more cognizant" (Alfarabi, "Political Regime," 75, sec. 90, Fauzi Najjar 86). See also the quotation from Avicenna's *Risala al-adhawiyya fi amr al-maad* in Daniel De Smet and Meryem Sebti, "Avicenna's Philosophical Approach to the Qur'an in the Light of His Tafsir Sūrat Al-Ikhlās," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 11, no. 2 (2010): 135.

⁷² Averroes, *Decisive Treatise*, 8, Müller 6.

⁷³ Cf. the remarks of Malik ibn Anas and Ibn Taymiyyah, quoted above, with Averroes, *Decisive Treatise*, 20, Müller 16.

⁷⁴ One can observe this in the discussion of the afterlife by Alfarabi and Averroes. In his now lost commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Alfarabi is reported to have branded talk of afterlife "senseless ravings and old wives' tales." However, he also quite easily speaks of the happiness in the afterlife in his political works. See Muhammad Ibn Tufayl, *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: A Philosophical Tale*, trans. Lenn Evan Goodman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 100; Shlomo Pines, "Limitations of Human Knowledge According to Al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājjā, and Maimonides," in *Collected Works of Shlomo Pines*, ed. Moshe Idel and W. Z. Harvey, vol. 5 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1997), 404; Alfarabi, "Selected Aphorisms," 58, aph. 89, Fauzi Najjar 92. The reason behind this contradiction can be found in Averroes's discussion of the Resurrection. Averroes rejects al-Ghazali's accusation that the philosophers do not believe in bodily resurrection by saying that the philosophers believe

of al-Ghazali, Averroes distinguishes between philosophy which “only leads a certain number of intelligent to the knowledge of happiness” whereas the Laws (i.e., religions) “seek the instruction of the masses generally.”⁷⁵ In other words, religion is primarily concerned with the many because the few wise men are capable of relying on their own reason to know the truth and to guide their lives. It is therefore not surprising that this tradition of philosophy looks at the Qur'an mostly as a political phenomenon rather than as a treasure trove of philosophical knowledge.

In going beyond Averroes to study the Muslim philosopher's view of the Qur'an, one must distinguish between the classical school of Islamic philosophy and the postclassical tradition; the latter is based on a form of speculative mystical theology. One can find the origin of this school in the works of al-Ghazali, especially in his critique of the *falasifa's* view that the Qur'an mainly addresses the many. Al-Ghazali argued that the Qur'an and revelation contain knowledge which goes beyond what is available to human reason and is therefore useful to the wise as well as the many.⁷⁶ The tradition which followed in al-Ghazali's footsteps looked at the Qur'an as a source of knowledge which unveils its secrets through esoteric reading. In the esoteric perspective, the Qur'anic text has two levels, *zahir* (outer, outward, obvious, *exōteros*) and *batin* (inner, inward, hidden, *esōteros*). An interpretation which takes its bearing from the hidden teaching of the text is called esoteric. This type of Qur'anic commentary, which can be seen in the writings of many philosopher-mystics such as Shahab ad-Din Suhrawardi, al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, and Mulla Sadra, builds a distinctive style of philosophy, or rather theosophy, by extracting the inward meaning of the Qur'an and Hadith through esoteric commentaries and spiritual hermeneutics. In this tradition, philosophical activity is inseparable from ascetic practices and penetration into the inner meaning of the Sacred Texts and sayings of the Prophet and imams, the texts which are considered fathomless and pregnant with the highest kind

in the Resurrection more than anybody else; the reason for this being that the belief in Resurrection “is conducive to an order amongst men on which man's being, as man, depends.” In other words, Averroes gives a purely utilitarian reason for the philosophers' belief in Resurrection. According to him, this belief provides an important framework for a virtuous life without which philosophic life is impossible. More explicitly, one can call it a salutary myth (Averroes, *Tahafut Al-Tahafut*, 359–63, Bouygues 580–88).

⁷⁵ Averroes, *Tahafut Al-Tahafut*, 360, Bouygues 582.

⁷⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Deliverance from Error: Five Key Texts including His Spiritual Autobiography, Al-Munqidh Min Al-Dalal*, trans. R. J. McCarthy (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2000), 83–87; Frank Griffel, “Muslim Philosophers' Rationalist Explanation of Muḥammad's Prophecy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 175–77.

of knowledge. The objective of this school, to borrow from Mulla Sadra, is to integrate *quran*, *irfan*, and *burhan*, that is, the Qur'an, gnostic knowledge, and philosophic demonstration.⁷⁷

Like the classical tradition, the esoteric reading of the Qur'an does not lack Qur'anic basis. As for the word "esoteric" (*batini*) itself, in the Qur'an God is called "the First and the Last; the Outer [*zahir*] and the Inner [*batin*]" (Q 57:3). In a famous verse (Q 3:7) often quoted by esoteric commentators of the Qur'an, it is said that some of the Qur'anic verses "are definite in meaning...and others are ambiguous."⁷⁸ The esoteric commentators are inspired by this passage and try to penetrate into the hidden meaning of the ambiguous verses that presumably contain mystical knowledge. Furthermore, the esoteric commentators have interpreted a passage that speaks about the wise who can grasp the meaning of God's comparisons as a justification for their own esoteric interpretation (Q 29:43). In this quest for hidden or esoteric meanings in the Qur'an, those parts of the Qur'an that have strong mystical aspects are used to justify its esoteric interpretation. For instance, the famous "Light verses" (Q 24:35) are often interpreted through esoteric commentaries.⁷⁹ Furthermore, scholars have often observed that the Qur'an is a metatextual, self-referential text; it speaks much about itself. The most significant aspect of the self-referential character of the Qur'an is its role in exegesis. Christians have traditionally interpreted the Old Testament allegorically, and in the New Testament, Jesus often makes use of parables which must be interpreted by readers. But the Qur'an itself invites allegorical interpretation. For instance, in the Qur'an the workings of nature are compared with human life and then it is said that such comparisons and allegories are "the way We explain the revelations for those who reflect" (Q 10:24, 14:25, 16:11–13, 16:65, 16:67, 20:54, 22:73, 23:21, 24:39–40, 25:50, 25:62, 26:8, 27:86, 36:33, 39:21, 45:13, 55:1ff., 59:21).

⁷⁷ Mustafa Muhaqqiq Damad, "The Quran and Schools of Islamic Theology and Philosophy," in *The Study Quran*, ed. Nasr et al., 1735.

⁷⁸ This verse is also quoted by Averroes. However, he uses it to reconcile the discoveries of philosophy with scripture, not for discovering truths unavailable to human reason. It is worth mentioning that the meaning of the passage depends on how or whether one breaks the verse. See Averroes, *Decisive Treatise*, 10, Müller 8, 53n20.

⁷⁹ For more examples see Kristin Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'an in Classical Islam* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2006); Muhaqqiq Damad, "The Quran and Schools of Islamic Theology and Philosophy"; Toby Mayer, "Traditions of Esoteric and Sapiential Qur'anic Commentary," in *The Study Quran*, ed. Nasr et al., 1659–79.

Whatever one might think about the legitimacy of such a theosophical approach to the Qur'an, we are here clearly faced with a different approach to the reason-revelation distinction in which a form of continuity replaces the sharp contrast between the two. This is how the whole reason-revelation distinction all but disappears in the postclassical tradition. In other words, this postclassical tradition is, properly speaking, a synthesis of philosophy and religion which easily leaps from one to another and thereby endangers the integrity of the philosophic activity as a rational enterprise.

CONCLUSION

As I have shown, owing to the ambiguity of the Qur'anic text there have been different views on the reason-revelation distinction in the Muslim scripture. Although the synthesis of philosophy and religion in the postclassical tradition of Islamic philosophy can be helpful in clarifying some aspects of the Qur'anic scripture, from the point of view of the reason-revelation distinction the most intriguing view belongs to the classical tradition of Islamic philosophy. The followers of this tradition tended to read the Qur'an as a rational work and considered Islam to be a rational religion compatible with philosophical activity, whose commands can be understood by natural reason. One might not be able to call this view orthodox or compatible with belief in revelation or the suprarational. However, one must also distinguish this view of the Qur'an from the simple denial of revelation, found for instance in Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi. The classical tradition maintains the scepticism of philosophy towards the suprarational claims of revelation, but at the same time it takes scripture seriously and tries to provide a rational foundation for it. This view is also helped by the fact that Islam has always seemed like a rather worldly religion to its defenders and detractors alike. Islam sounds particularly free of any "mysteries" and its founder is more like an earthly ruler than a classic prophet parting the seas or asking us to believe the unbelievable, such as that a God changed into a man and walked on water. I showed that an attentive reading of the Qur'an can lead us to believe that Muslim philosophers' conception of the Qur'an (a work of reason whose content is in principle accessible to human reason) is not entirely unfaithful to the spirit of the Qur'an. Therefore, I believe this view should not be considered solely the Muslim philosophers' exoteric teaching but rather an essential part of their unique philosophical vision.

Leo Strauss on Machiavelli's *The Prince* and the *Discourses*: A Recently Discovered Lecture

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Among the Leo Strauss Papers is a notebook containing the draft of an essay on Machiavelli that was later published as the Machiavelli chapter in *History of Political Philosophy*.¹ At the top of the first page in Strauss's handwriting is written: "A year ago I could have elaborated or improvised a lecture for your profit or enjoyment. But: 1972.—I can only read to you a lecture (chapter on Mach. in *History*)."² It seems that the occasion of the marginalia was the lecture given at St. John's Annapolis, Maryland, in September 1972, where Strauss had taught as a scholar in residence since 1969. The four tapes of this lecture, which bear the title "Strauss, Leo—Machiavelli: *The Prince and Discourses*," were recently discovered and remastered by the Leo Strauss Center at the University of Chicago.

The essay underlying the lecture is Strauss's second monograph on Machiavelli after his 1958 *Thoughts on Machiavelli*.² It cannot be described as a summary of his complex book, but rather an original contribution. The

¹ Leo Strauss, "Niccolò Machiavelli," in *History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Joseph Cropsey and Leo Strauss, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 271–92. This chapter replaced the Machiavelli chapter in the first edition from 1963, originally written by Warren Winiarski. The same essay was also intended for the thirteenth chapter of *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*. Strauss did not live to see the publication of that collection and *Studies* was edited and published ten years after Strauss's death with an introduction by Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

² The first monograph was published two years before this lecture: Leo Strauss, "Machiavelli and Classical Literature," *Review of National Literatures* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1970): 7–25.

essay begins with a discussion on virtue but rapidly the relationship between Machiavelli and religion comes to the fore, thereby confirming Strauss's claim that the theologico-political problem is *the* theme of his studies.³ The beginning of the lecture corresponds roughly to the beginning of the chapter on Machiavelli in *History of Political Philosophy*. In this common part, the influence of Machiavelli on Spinoza and Hobbes as well as the moral philosophy of Machiavelli are discussed. Owing to health problems, Strauss stops reading his notes at the end of the section on *The Prince*; the rest of the time is devoted to a question-and-answer session on Machiavelli along with a short commentary on a passage from the *Discourses on Livy*. The question-and-answer section addresses several issues that are important for clarifying different aspects Strauss's interpretation of Machiavelli, including the place of *Mandragola* in Machiavelli's thought, Machiavelli's view of philosophy, Strauss's own discovery of Machiavelli, the reception of Machiavelli in Europe, and the efforts of Machiavelli's successors in making his philosophy acceptable. Strauss tries once to return briefly to the subject of his lecture by commenting on a cosmological passage from the *Discourses*. In his comments, he underscores Machiavelli's affinity with Renaissance Averroists and their belief in the eternity of the world.

Editor's Note: The handwritten notes of the lecture are found in the Leo Strauss Papers at Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, Box 14, Folder 8. In my transcript of the tapes book titles are standardized, a few grammatical errors are corrected, and footnotes are used to provide relevant information and to identify Strauss's references. All errors are the responsibility of the editor. Copyright to the texts belongs to the estate of Leo Strauss. I thank Nathan Tarcov, Strauss's literary executor, for giving me permission to publish the transcript and Timothy W. Burns, who accepted it for publication in *Interpretation*. Gayle McKeen, the associate director of the Leo Strauss Center, greatly helped me in this project, Svetozar Minkov deciphered Strauss's marginalia, and Theodore Blanton identified the month of the lecture.

³ Leo Strauss, "Preface to *Hobbes' Politische Wissenschaft*," *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (January 1979): 1–3. For a remarkable reading of the chapter from the point of view of the theologico-political problem see Heinrich Meier, *Political Philosophy and the Challenge of Revealed Religion*, trans. Robert Berman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 108–13.

LEO STRAUSS'S LECTURE ON MACHIAVELLI'S *THE PRINCE* AND *THE DISCOURSES*, ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, SEPTEMBER 1972

Strauss: [in progress] campus, at the suggestion of the dean. And this was transformed into readable form for the second edition of the *History of Political Philosophy*, edited by Mr. Joseph Cropsey and myself. And this will come out in the course of this year. I think it is already in print. And what I can do is only to read to you what I said on that occasion or wrote on that occasion, and I am sorry if I can't do better than that. The only improvement possible is that we could have some discussion afterward. I hope that satisfies you. Now, after this introductory remark, I just begin to read. I hope you don't mind. So if you have difficulties in understanding just raise your hand, right or the left, whichever you prefer, and Mr. [Theodore] Blanton will be so good as to act as the interpreter and translate your objections or difficulties into articulate language. Is it all right? Now, I begin.

We talk all the time about virtue, although we may not use the word "virtue," but for example "the quality of life," or "the great society," or "ethical," or "square." But do we know what virtue is? Socrates drew from this a conclusion that it is the greatest good for a human being to make everyday speeches about virtue, apparently without ever finding a completely satisfactory answer.⁴ If we seek however the most elaborate and least ambiguous answer to this truly vital question we would turn to Aristotle's *Ethics*, where we would read among other things that there is a virtue of the first order called magnanimity, the habit of choosing high honors for oneself while being worthy of them.⁵ We also read there that sense of shame is not a virtue. Shame is becoming for the young who owing to their immaturity cannot help making mistakes, but not for mature men who are well bred, who as such simply do not make mistakes and therefore have no use for sense of shame.⁶ Wonderful as these things are we have received a very different message from a very different quarter. When the prophet Isaiah received his vocation he was overpowered by the sense of his unworthiness: "I am a man of unclean lips amidst a people of unclean lips."⁷ This amounts to an implicit condemnation of magnanimity and an implicit vindication of the sense of shame. The reason given in the context is

⁴ Plato, *Apology of Socrates* 38a.

⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1123b2-4.

⁶ Aristotle, *Nic. Eth.* 1108a32, 1128b16-23.

⁷ Isa. 6:5.

this: “Holy, holy, [holy] is the lord of hosts.”⁸ There is no holy god for Aristotle and the Greeks generally. Who is right? The Greeks, or the Jews? Athens, or Jerusalem? And how to proceed in order to find out who is right? Must we not admit that human wisdom is unable to settle this question, and that every answer is based on an act of faith? But does this not constitute the complete and final defeat of Athens? For a philosophy based on faith is no longer philosophy. Perhaps it was this unresolved conflict which did not permit Western thought ever to come to rest. Perhaps it is this conflict which is at the bottom of a kind of thought which is philosophic indeed but no longer Greek: modern philosophy. It is when we try to understand modern philosophy that we come across Machiavelli. We usually do not think of this when we speak of Machiavelli. And who does not speak of Machiavelli?

He is the only political thinker whose name has come into common use for designating a kind of politics which has existed, exists, and will exist independently of his influence: politics guided exclusively by considerations of expediency, which uses all reasons fair or foul, iron or poison for achieving its ends—its ends being the aggrandizement of one’s country or fatherland, but also using one’s fatherland in the service of one’s own self-aggrandizement of the politician or statesman. But if this phenomenon is as old as political society itself, why is it called after Machiavelli, who thought or wrote only a short while ago, about five hundred years ago? Machiavelli, we shall reply, was the first to publicly defend it in books with his name on the title page. Machiavelli made it publicly defensible. This means that his achievement, detestable or admirable, cannot be understood in terms of politics itself or of the history of politics—say, in terms of the Italian Renaissance—but in terms of political thought, political philosophy, of the history of political philosophy.

Machiavelli must have achieved a break with all preceding political philosophy. There is weighty evidence in support of this. Yet his largest work, his *Discourses*, serves the purpose of bringing about the rebirth of the ancient Roman Republic. Far from being a radical innovator, Machiavelli is a restorer of something old and forgotten.⁹

To find our bearings let us first glance at two post-Machiavellian thinkers: Hobbes and Spinoza. Hobbes regarded his political philosophy as wholly new. More than that, he denied that there existed prior to his work a political

⁸ Isa. 6:3.

⁹ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 1, Preface.

philosophy or political science worthy of the name.¹⁰ He regarded himself as the founder of the true political philosophy, as the true founder of political philosophy. He knew of course that a political doctrine claiming to be true existed since Socrates, but this doctrine was according to Hobbes a dream rather than science.¹¹ For according to him Socrates and his successors were anarchists since they permitted the appeal from the law of the land, the positive law, to a higher law, the natural law. And they thus fostered this order utterly incompatible with civil society while, according to Hobbes, the higher law, the natural law, commands so to speak one and only one thing: unqualified obedience to the sovereign power. It would not be difficult to show that this line of reasoning is contradicted by Hobbes's own teaching. At any rate it does not go to the root of the matter. Hobbes's serious objection to all earlier political philosophy comes out most clearly in this statement: "they that have written of Justice & Policy in general, do all invade each and themselves, with contradiction. To reduce this doctrine to the rules and infallibility of reason, there is no way but first to put such principles down for a foundation, as passion not mistrusting may not seek to displace; and afterwards to build thereon the truth of cases in the law of nature (which hitherto have been built in the air) by degrees, till the whole be inexpugnable."¹² The rationalism of the true political teaching consists in its being acceptable to passion, agreeable to passion. The passion which must be the basis of the rational political teaching is fear of violent death. At first glance there seems to be an alternative to it: the passion of generosity, that's to say, as Hobbes says: "a glory, or pride, in appearing not to need to break (one's word)." But this "is a generosity too rarely found to be presumed on, especially in the pursuer of wealth, command or sensual pleasure; which are the greatest part of mankind."¹³ Hobbes attempts to build on the most common ground, on the ground that is admittedly low but has the advantage of being solid, whereas the traditional teaching was built in the air. On the new basis, the status of morality must be lowered. Morality is nothing but fear-inspired peaceableness. The moral law as natural law is understood as derivative from the right of nature. The right of self-preservation. The fundamental moral fact is a right, not a duty. This new spirit became the spirit of the modern era, including our own age.

¹⁰ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, Epistle Dedicatory.

¹¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 46.

¹² Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, Ep. Ded.

¹³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 14.

Hobbes is in a way a teacher of Spinoza. Nevertheless, Spinoza opens his *Political Treatise* with an attack on *the* philosophers. The philosophers, he says, treat the passions as vices. By ridiculing or deploring the passions, they believe to praise a human nature which exists nowhere. They conceive of men not as they are but as they would wish them to be. Hence their political teaching is wholly useless. Quite different is the case of the *politici*, of the political men. They have learned from experience that there will be vices as long as there will be human beings. Hence their political teaching is very valuable and Spinoza is building his teaching on theirs. The greatest of these *politici* is the most penetrating Florentine, Machiavelli. It is Machiavelli's more subdued attack on traditional political philosophy which Spinoza bodily takes over and translates into the less reserved language of Hobbes. As for the sentence "there will be vices as long as there will be human beings," Spinoza has tacitly borrowed it from Tacitus. In Spinoza's mouth, it amounts to an unqualified rejection of the belief in the Messianic age. The coming of the Messianic age would require divine intervention, or a miracle. But according to Spinoza miracles are impossible.

Spinoza's introduction to the *Political Treatise* is obviously modeled on the fifteenth chapter of Machiavelli's *Prince*. There Machiavelli says:

Since I know that many have written (on how princes should rule), I fear that by writing about it I will be held to be presumptuous by departing, especially in discussing such a subject, from the others. But since it is my intention to write something useful for him who understands, it has seemed to me to be more appropriate to go straight to the effective truth of the matter rather than to the imagination thereof. For many have imagined republics and principalities which have never been seen nor are known truly to exist. There is so great a distance between how one lives and how one ought to live that he who rejects what people do in favor of what one ought to do, brings about his ruin rather than his preservation; for a man who wishes to do in every matter what is good, will be ruined among so many who are not good. Hence it is necessary for a prince who wishes to maintain himself, to learn to be able not to be good, or use goodness and abstain from using it according to the commands of circumstances.

One arrives at imagined kingdoms or republics if one takes one's bearings by how men ought to live, by virtue. The classical philosophers did just that. They thus arrived at the best regime of the *Republic* and the *Politics*. But when speaking of imagined kingdoms Machiavelli thinks not only of the philosophers; he also thinks of the kingdom of God, which from his point of view is a conceit of visionaries, for as his pupil Spinoza said, justice rules

only where just men rule.¹⁴ But to stay with the philosophers, they regarded the actualization of the best regime as possible but extremely improbable. According to Plato, its actualization literally depends on a coincidence, a most unlikely coincidence, the coincidence of philosophy and political power.¹⁵ The actualization of the best regime depends on chance, on *Fortuna*, that is to say, on something which is essentially beyond human control. According to Machiavelli, however, *Fortuna* is a woman who as such must be hit and beaten to be kept under. *Fortuna* can be vanquished by the right kind of man.¹⁶ There is a connection between this posture toward *Fortuna* and the orientation by how men do live. By lowering the standards of political excellence one guarantees the actualization of the only kind of political order which is in principle possible.

Machiavelli is not concerned with how men do live merely in order to describe it. His intention is rather, on the basis of knowledge of how men do live, to teach princes how they ought to rule and even how they ought to live. Accordingly, he rewrites as it were Aristotle's *Ethics*. To some extent he admits that the traditional teaching is true: men are obliged to live virtuously in the Aristotelian sense. But he denies that living virtuously is living happily or leads to happiness. If liberality, for example, is used in the manner in which you are obliged to use it, it hurts you. For if you use it virtuously and how one ought to use it, the prince will ruin himself and will be compelled to rule his subjects oppressively in order to get the necessary money. Miserliness, the opposite of liberality, is one of the vices which enable a prince to rule. A prince ought to be liberal, however, with the property of others, for this increases his reputation.¹⁷ Similar considerations apply to compassion and its opposite, cruelty. This leads Machiavelli to the question of whether it is better for a prince to be loved rather than to be feared or vice versa. It is difficult to be both loved and feared. Since one must therefore choose, one ought to choose being feared rather than being loved, for whether one is loved depends on others, while being feared depends on oneself. But one must avoid being hated. The prince will avoid becoming hated if he abstains from the property and the women of his subjects—especially from their property, for men resent less the murder of their father than the loss of their patrimony. In war the reputation for cruelty does not do any harm. The greatest example

¹⁴ Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, chap. 19.

¹⁵ Plato, *Republic* 473d.

¹⁶ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chap. 25.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, chap. 16.

is Hannibal who was always implicitly obeyed by his soldiers and never had to contend with mutinies either after victories or after defeats: "This could not arise from anything but his inhuman cruelty which, together with his innumerable virtues, made him always venerable and terrible in the eyes of his soldiers, and without which cruelty his other virtues would not have sufficed. Not very considerably the writers on the one hand admire his action and on the other condemn the main cause of the same."¹⁸ We see here that inhuman cruelty is one of Hannibal's virtues. Another example of cruelty well used, as Machiavelli puts it, is supplied by Cesare Borgia's pacification of the Romagna. In order to pacify that country, he put at its head Ramiro d'Orco: "a man of cruelty and dispatch," and gave him the fullest power. Ramiro succeeded in no time, acquiring the greatest reputation. But then Cesare thought that such an excessive power was no longer necessary and might make him, Cesare, hated. He knew that the rigorous measures taken by Ramiro had caused some hatred. Cesare wished therefore to show that if any cruelty had been committed, it was not his doing but arose from the harsh nature of his subordinate. Therefore he had him put one morning in two pieces on the piazza of the chief town with a piece of wood and a bloody knife at his side. The ferocity of this sight induced the populace to be in a state of satisfaction and stupor.¹⁹

Machiavelli's new "ought" demands then the judicious and vigorous use of both virtue and vice according to the requirements of the circumstances. The judicious alternation of virtue and vice is virtue, *virtù*, in Machiavelli's meaning of the word. He amuses himself and I believe some of his readers by using the word "virtue" in both the traditional sense and his sense. Occasionally he makes a distinction between *virtù* and *bontà*, goodness. That distinction was in a way prepared by Cicero who says that men are called good on account of their modesty, temperance, and above all, justice and keeping of faith, as distinguished from courage and wisdom.²⁰ The Ciceronian distinction within the virtues in its turn reminds us of Plato's *Republic*, in which temperance and justice are virtues required of all, whereas courage and wisdom are required only of some.²¹ In Machiavelli the distinction between goodness and other virtues tends to become an opposition between goodness and virtue. While virtue is required of rulers and soldiers, goodness

¹⁸ Ibid., chap. 17.

¹⁹ Ibid., chap. 7.

²⁰ Cicero, *De officiis* 2.11.

²¹ Plato, *Rep.* 428aff.

is required, or characteristic, of the populace engaged in peaceful occupations. Goodness comes to mean something like fear, fear-bred obedience to the government, or even violence.

In quite a few passages of *The Prince*, Machiavelli speaks of morality in the way in which decent men have spoken of it at all times. He has resolved the contradiction in the 19th chapter of *The Prince*, in which he discusses the Roman emperors who came after the philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius up to Maximinus. The high point is the discussion of the emperor Severus. Severus belonged to those emperors who were most cruel and rapacious. Yet in him was so great virtue that he could always reign with felicity, for he knew well how to use the person of the fox and the lion, which natures a prince must imitate. A new prince in a new principality cannot imitate the actions of the good emperor Marcus Aurelius, nor is it necessary for him to follow those of Severus. But he ought to take from Severus those actions which are necessary for founding his state and from Marcus those which are appropriate and glorious for preserving a state already firmly established. The chief theme of *The Prince* is a wholly new prince in a wholly new state, that is to say, the founder. And the model for the founder as founder is the extremely clever criminal Severus. This means that justice is precisely not, as Augustine had taught, the foundation of kingdoms. The foundation of justice is injustice. The foundation of morality is immorality. The foundation of legitimacy is illegitimacy or, in our language, revolution. The foundation of freedom is tyranny. At the beginning there is terror, not harmony or love. But there is of course a great difference between terror for its own sake, for the sake of its perpetuation, and terror which limits itself to laying the foundation for that degree of humanity and freedom which is compatible with the human condition. But this distinction is at best hinted at in *The Prince*.

The comforting message of *The Prince*—for it contains a comforting message—is given in the last chapter, which is an exhortation addressed to an Italian prince, Lorenzo de' Medici, to take Italy and to liberate her from the barbarians, that is to say, the French, the Spaniards, and the Germans. Machiavelli tells Lorenzo that the liberation of Italy is not very difficult. One of the reasons he gives is that “extraordinary events without example that have been induced by God, are seen: the sea has divided itself, the cloud has led you on your way, the stone has poured out water, manna has rained.” The events without example do have an example: the miracles following Israel's liberation from Egyptian bondage. What Machiavelli seems to suggest is that Italy is the promised land for Lorenzo. But there is one difficulty: Moses, who

led Israel out of the house of bondage towards the promised land, did not reach that land. He died at its borders. Machiavelli thus darkly prophesied that Lorenzo will not liberate Italy, one reason being that he lacks the extraordinary *virtù* needed for bringing that great work to its consummation. But there is more to the extraordinary events without example of which nothing is known other than what Machiavelli asserts about them. All these extraordinary events occurred before the revelation on Sinai. What Machiavelli prophesies is that a new revelation, a revelation of a new Decalogue, is imminent. The bringer of that revelation is of course not that mediocrity Lorenzo, but a new Moses. That new Moses is Machiavelli himself, and the new Decalogue is the wholly new teaching on the wholly new prince in a wholly new state. It is true that Moses was an armed prophet and that Machiavelli belongs to the unarmed ones who necessarily come to ruin, as is said in *The Prince*. In order to find the solution for this difficulty one must turn to the other great work of Machiavelli, the *Discourses*.

Now forgive me ladies and gentlemen if I make a pause for sheer bodily reasons and let us have a discussion of what I said about *The Prince* before we turn to the *Discourses*.

Student: You mentioned Hobbes. There is a passage I am trying to put in simple words in which he condemns the afterlife as a matter of superstition. That rejection must precede the turning to passions as the focal point of political power.²²

Strauss: Well, I thought you would begin with a more simple question: whether Hobbes ever mentions Machiavelli. As far as I remember, never. That is Hobbes's peculiar decency. That he doesn't mention Machiavelli. I was in former years a close student of Hobbes and it took me years and years until I saw Machiavelli behind Hobbes.²³ Now, of course there is a connection, you are quite true: fear of violent death cannot have that terrific importance if there is a life after death. And therefore the whole Hobbesian doctrine presupposes the denial of life after death. That is what you were driving at? Yes, it is implied. There is a discussion of this subject in the *Leviathan*. I wish I could reconstruct that. He says somewhere that there are two kinds of fear which can make men decent. The one is the greater fear and the other is the fear of a

²² This is a summary of a comment that is partly inaudible.

²³ See Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), xvi.

greater object, I believe.²⁴ That is not the word he uses, but it amounts to that. Meaning this: the fear of death is one and the fear, say, of punishment after death. But for people what is decisive practically is the fear of death, because punishment after death presupposes the belief already of a life after death and that is questionable. Mr. Berns?

Laurence Berns: In the comparison of Hobbes with Machiavelli, isn't there a fundamental contrast between the two in connection with the status of glory? Hobbes's whole construction depends upon the ability to sort of overwhelm the desire for glory by fear of the sovereign. It would seem that, in that respect, in what he says about the importance of glory and honor, Machiavelli is closer to the classics. I happen to be reading Hegel lately and Hegel seems also to restore the desire for honor and desire for glory. He even makes it fundamental, if you understand recognition in that way. So it would seem almost as if there is a classical element in, say, Machiavelli and Hegel. This isn't in Hobbes.

Strauss: Yes, sure. Hobbes in this respect as in some others is the most modern of the three, leading up very soon from this self-preservation toward what Locke called comfortable self-preservation. And that is much more the spirit of modern times than honor or glory.

Laurence Berns: It is in one sense, but I think it seems the kind of revolutionary impulse that seems to almost dominate academia almost everywhere, seems to have a great deal with love of honor and glory.

Strauss: Academic life? [Laughter]

Berns: No, not academic life, the spirit of revolution, to a certain extent as a kind of reaction, perhaps.

Strauss: But if you think, the moment of revolution is a class struggle. And this has to do with the relations of production. Then you are straight in Locke. I do not deny that a very low kind of striving for honor and glory and prestige plays a very great role in academic life. But in the academic teaching, especially in the academic teaching of sociology, there is no place for honor and glory.

Berns: Except in so far as it foments revolution, somehow the revolutionary...

²⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 14.

Strauss: *Ja*, but according to the orthodox teaching, as they would call it, revolution has to do with class struggle and class struggle has to do with relations of production and that is Locke, and Locke is only a modification of Hobbes. But there is another point implied in what you said and that is that the man who was the much more revolutionary thinker of these two, Machiavelli and Hobbes, namely Machiavelli, had to be mitigated, had to be made acceptable by men like Hobbes or by men like Locke in order to become successful. I believe that is a general, one can almost speak of a universal law that such teachings have to be made acceptable and digestible to be powerful.

Berns: The only thing is that it seems to me that one could also say that this respectability in a certain sense became boring so that the other thing had to come back in too, via Hegel. Namely, something like craving for glory, craving for recognition at least.

Strauss: But I do not know whether Hegel is as important in this connection as somebody else who corrected Hobbes and Locke and who had I believe a much broader influence than Hegel, namely, Rousseau. The whole sentiment, especially the sentiment of compassion opposing comfortable self-preservation...

Strauss: [tape resumes] of transpolitical morality, if I may say so, and political morality. And there is no place for that in Machiavelli.

Student: But there is no real dilution of power, there is no concept of that in Machiavelli. Either he is a successful prince or he is a punk, there is not much...

Strauss: *Ja*, then Machiavelli would prefer one who is not a beast, enjoying killing and torturing for its own sake. He would do that. But if you would raise the question "why do you do that?" whether you would get a very clear answer from Machiavelli is not so easy to say. Because then the main point would be that he is an efficient prince.

Student: But, you would agree there is no, in terms of theoretical conception, there is no concept of dilution of power guided by...

Strauss: Not that I know. I don't think so. At least I do not see at the moment.

Student: It seems to me that the greatest possible human achievement for Machiavelli is the founding you spoke of. I wonder whether that requires a rejection of the alternatives to the greatest possible human existence, take

philosophy understood in a certain way. But it is so curious, to me at any rate, he is silent, utterly silent...

Strauss: I am sure it does. But not quite, he is not utterly silent; silent, yes he is, but there is a passage I believe just in the center of the *Florentine Histories* where he tells a story of Cato, the famous Cato, who expelled the philosophers from Rome, and Machiavelli praises Cato for that.²⁵ Rome would not have remained so healthy and strong for such a long time if Cato had not driven out the philosophers. Philosophy and a healthy republican life are incompatible. That is nothing new but it is in Machiavelli too. But it is better known today through Rousseau but it is also in Machiavelli. Yes, and surely the philosophic life is not—the great question whether the philosophic or the political life is preferable is not explicitly, thematically discussed by Machiavelli. To that extent, I agree with you.

Student: Then the suggestion is that the philosophical life remains as a kind of ultimate rival possibility...

Strauss: Of course, all these things have their depth and their surfaces. Now what does the contemplative life mean in Machiavelli's time in popular use? The life of monks. And he was against them. And he preferred the Scipios and Hannibals and such individuals to the monks. Therefore, he had no place for the contemplative life. But of course, it doesn't mean that he was not himself in his way a contemplative man. There is a painting of Machiavelli of his later years, I think it is in Florence somewhere, where he looks like a monk.²⁶ Not that he was a particularly ascetic man, which he was not. But a certain intransigence, contemplative intransigence which he had.

Student: I think the difficulty however is the question of the object of contemplation. Thinking about the human things which seems to have been his greatest contemplation, I think one wouldn't deny this being thought as a philosophic life...

Strauss: That's a good point. In other words, that he gave thought to the human passions, to the human soul, you would probably admit. Although he never uses the word "soul," in *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, never. Also for an obvious reason, because of the religious connotations. There are two Italian words, going back to two kindred Latin words: *animo* from *animus* and

²⁵ Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 5.1.

²⁶ This is probably the portrait of Machiavelli by Cristofano Dell'Altissimo di Papi kept at Uffizi Gallery in Florence.

anima from *anima*. *Anima* means soul; he never uses that in the two great works. But *animo* he uses all the time. I would translate *animo* by something like “temper.” That exists. But *anima*, the less said about it the better. But that is not all; he has also to think about the government of the whole, of the whole universe. He speaks about it, with extreme rarity. But he does. I may say something about that later.

Student: We could say that the first sentence of *The Prince* indicates that: “all states and all principalities.”

Strauss: In other words, not only human but also the universe.

Student: There is also the fact that when I first learned about it came as a surprise: that they found that he prepared evidently rather carefully a text of Lucretius.

Strauss: Yes. There is no doubt that he was familiar with this kind of thing. This manuscript still exists, did you know that? In Florence. And some individual will probably edit Machiavelli’s emendations.²⁷ On our way here, Mr. Blanton, you had a question which I thought was very sensible. But I refused to answer it because I thought maybe it will come out from this discussion. Do you remember what your difficulty regarding *The Prince* was?

Blanton: It had to do with the very soul of the prince, the very man the prince. It seemed that he must mouth things of mercy and religion and yet he must be able in a minute to turn around and do the very basest things. And I am wondering, that raises the question for me of the implications of *The Prince* itself. It seems to me that the man on the top would be a man without friends, let’s say, at least a man without much happiness, unless he can take some sort of...

Strauss: But he derives an enormous happiness from his success, from his power, from his ruling. You presuppose, according to Machiavelli erroneously, that happiness consists in virtue, in moral virtue. That he denies. He would say that the prince would become very miserable if he were to act always virtuously.

Blanton: But I am thinking he brings up several times in *The Prince* Hiero of Syracuse. And it makes me think of the dialogue of Xenophon...

²⁷ See Chauncey E. Finch, “Machiavelli’s Copy of Lucretius,” *Classical Journal* 56, no. 1 (1960): 29–32.

Strauss: That has nothing to do with that. This Hiero has nothing to do with Xenophon's Hiero. They are entirely different men. That was a kind of copybook example of a virtuous prince of later antiquity.

Blanton: But it would seem to me that the prince would be a man who couldn't sleep at night, who is constantly fearful of every man around him.

Strauss: Do you believe that Stalin did not enjoy excellent sleep? I admit I was never in his bedroom but I believe he slept very well. Especially after he had committed a considerable amount of murders of people who could be dangerous to him. I think that is a prejudice that criminals, especially large-scale criminals, have sleepless nights on account of their crimes. At least that is surely Machiavelli's opinion. It would be wonderful if that were so. Surely you can say Stalin was punished soon after his death where in the 20th or 21st Congress where Khrushchev made his famous condemnation of Stalin. But he did not hear anymore.

Student: There is a powerful sentence in Capote's book *In Cold Blood*. It depicts Perry Smith in that book who says that I liked Mr. Clutter, he was a nice guy. I thought so up until the time I slashed his throat... He did not regret the crime. There was no regret, yet he expressed this...

Strauss: I believe that the question which you put to me on our way here was somewhat different. But I am sorry I cannot reconstruct it. I think the point is this: Machiavelli's virtue, in his sense of virtue, however beastly it is, must have a reward, on the basis of Machiavelli's principles. Otherwise it wouldn't be effective. But the reward is glory, honor, and especially on a large scale. If he is not... Well, how did Stalin say about Hitler, this beautiful sentence: Hitler was a very able man, but basically not intelligent. This implies that Stalin thought about himself that he was both, very able and basically intelligent man. He founded really a new empire. He died in '53 and it still lasts. Hitler's didn't last twelve years, although he promised a thousand years. Now if you think of those people who established empires which lasted centuries and were looked up to and revered by many generations as great men—think of Julius Caesar, among other people—that is worthy. That weighs more heavy in the scales than being stabbed by Khrushchevs. He would say, of course Caesar committed a lot of crimes but all these crimes led to the fact that Rome lasted for a couple of centuries more, otherwise she would have gone to pieces because of the conflict between the patricians and the plebeians. You can then turn it around and say Machiavelli's immoral teaching implies a moral teaching of sorts: to establish and to found and

preserve a civil society by means utterly incompatible with ordinary decency but forming the basis of ordinary decency; where would people be able to act with ordinary decency if there were not a civil society? A civil society which their ordinary decency can never bring about. And therefore one can make a moral case, so to speak, for Machiavelli's immoralism, and I think that was never completely alien to his thought, but on the other hand he did not conceal that implication.

Student: But look what he has to do. If the prince comes by it by his own fortune or his own ability, the prince, in order to found his state, has to do away with the very best men. Those men who have intelligence or ambition to be anything like him must be annihilated and it leaves only the men he is left to deal with, just ordinary men.

Strauss: But there are various degrees of ordinary men. Think of Caesar and his friends who for reasons of decency opposed him, the conspirators, especially Brutus and Cassius. If I understand Shakespeare's play correctly, what it means is this: Caesar could never have been disposed of except by the alliance between Brutus and Cassius. Brutus whose honesty vouched for the honesty of the enterprise and Cassius who had the political sense, the Machiavellianism. To make this [understandable], how did they call it, in the last election? In connection with [George] McGovern? How did they call that? I do not know. It was a word used in connection with McGovern the last election. Integrity or something of this kind. Politically manageable. But this applies already to an earlier stage. If this was the basis of alliance between Brutus and Cassius, Brutus supplying the morality and Cassius supplying the Machiavellianism. Then they murder Caesar. The whole thing doesn't work because now the difference between Brutus and Cassius destroys the alliance. So, that is the proof that Caesar was necessary. You can have this only in one man, not in an alliance of two. This is what happened then. Brutus ruins somehow the Machiavellianism of Cassius. And Cassius on the other hand endangers the integrity of Brutus. That is an indirect proof of the necessity for Caesar, for in Hegelian language a synthesis of Brutus and Cassius which is superior to the ingredients of Brutus on the one hand and Cassius on the other. And I believe something of this kind was in Shakespeare's mind and of course also in Machiavelli's mind.

Student: I believe in *The Prince* there is a passage regarding the will of fortune, that despite the professed attempts of the prince his rule will decline...

Strauss: Because of the power of *Fortuna*. Chapter 25.

Student: Fortune. Is that to be taken seriously?

Strauss: Yes, but it is qualified there. *Fortuna* is very powerful but if a man is very strong and very virile then he can keep *Fortuna* under and therefore *Fortuna* is ultimately no danger for the right kind of man.

Student: My other question is about the possibility of making a case for the morality of the prince in the circumstances of the founding. What came to my mind was your distinction in *Natural Right* between means necessary in extraordinary situations versus means necessary in ordinary situations. Machiavelli does not seem to make any such distinction.

Strauss: But he implies it. I do not remember at the moment a clear example, but sure.

Student: Would you say that he also makes the case persuasively that the actions of the prince are in the name of the good of the whole?

Strauss: That goes without saying. He mentions this I think in the first chapter where he speaks about virtue and vice in general, that is chapter 15, where he says he must use virtue and vice both, alternately, as circumstances require.

Student: That part I understand, but I am not convinced that...

Strauss: But in this connection he says he must of course always speak of the virtues, and say he does it in the name of piety, of liberality, and the other things when he acts impiously and illiberally and so on. This is, I would say, rather elementary as for Machiavelli. But it was in the literature, it was not quite elementary and after Machiavelli's time there was a school of thought called "Tacitismo," from Tacitus, where Tacitus's description of the Roman emperors, especially the more decent ones, was used as a kind of mirrors of princes, a Machiavellian kind of princely government, and this played a great role in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. It ended only around 1700 I would say. That was an enormous literature.

Student: I can't remember the chapter in *The Prince*, but he says he intends to speak about law, or alludes to the fact that he might speak about law, but he goes on to stress how the prince must always be concerned with war, even in so-called peace time he must be a fighter, and all he is thinking about the nobles, the landscape, he never, in *The Prince* at least, comes back to law, never says much about it.

Strauss: The whole plan of *The Prince* excludes law as law, it is chapters... my memory is no longer what it was...it's a sequence of chapters dealing with

war, these are chapters 12, 13, and 14, I believe. I do not know, but I believe it is. So you would of course expect the war, but he speaks instead of war of the prince and his enemies, and then the other part which deals with the prince and his friends, has to do with his subjects, his obedient subjects, that is law, they will obey the law. So the law as law did not have such an importance because the law presupposes the power to lay down the law and to enforce the law, and that is Machiavelli's theme, not the law as law. That is just the opposite of Hobbes; he wrote a book called *De Cive, Of Citizen*. He didn't write a book "Of Prince." And the main lesson given to the subject, to the citizen by Hobbes, is: obey your prince. The commands which the prince gives and ought to give, that was not Hobbes's theme. You have to figure that out for yourself. That's his advice here. To a considerable extent they surely would not be identical with Aristotle's advices but they would be somewhat less harsh than those of Machiavelli, there is no doubt.

Now since the question of Machiavelli's cosmology was implied in the discussion a short while before, I believe I will discuss briefly *the* chapter of the *Discourses* in which this subject is discussed. You have the *Discourses* with you. Book 2, chapter 5 and read that.

Blanton: From the beginning?

Strauss: *Ja*. But read slowly.

Blanton:

To those philosophers who maintain that the world has existed from eternity, we might reply, that, if it were really of such antiquity, there would reasonably be some record beyond five thousand years, were it not that we see how the records of time are destroyed by various causes, some being the acts of men and some of Heaven. Those that are the acts of men are the changes of religion and of language; for when a new sect springs up, that is to say a new religion, the first effort is (by way of asserting itself and gaining influence) to destroy the old or existing one; and when it happens that the founders of the new religion speak a different language, then the destruction of the old religion is easily effected. This we know from observing the proceedings of the Christians against the heathen religion; for they destroyed all its institutions and all its ceremonies, and effaced all record of the ancient theology. It is true that they did not succeed in destroying entirely the record of the glorious deeds of the illustrious men of the ancient creed, for they were forced to keep up the Latin language by the necessity of writing their new laws in that tongue; but if they could have written them in a new language (bearing in mind their other persecutions),

there would have been no record whatever left of preceding events. Whoever reads the proceedings of St. Gregory, and of the other heads of the Christian religion, will see with what obstinacy they persecuted all ancient memorials, burning the works of the historians and of the poets, destroying the statues and images and despoiling everything else that gave but an indication of antiquity. So that, if they had added a new language to this persecution, everything relating to previous events would in a very short time have been sunk in oblivion.

It is reasonable to suppose that what the Christians practiced towards the Pagans, these practiced in like manner upon their predecessors. And as the religions changed two or three times in six thousand years, all memory of the things done before that time was lost; and if nevertheless some vestiges of it remain, they are regarded as fabulous, and are believed by no one; as is the case with the history of Diodorus Siculus, who gives an account of some forty or fifty thousand years, yet is generally looked upon as being mendacious, and I believe with justice.

As to causes produced by Heaven, they are such as destroy the human race, and reduce the inhabitants of some parts of the world to a very few in number; such as pestilence, famine, or inundations. Of this the latter are the most important, partly because they are most universal, and partly because the few that escape are chiefly ignorant mountaineers, who, having no knowledge of antiquity themselves, cannot transmit any to posterity. And should there be amongst those who escape any that have such knowledge, they conceal or pervert it in their own fashion, for the purpose of gaining influence and reputation; so that there remains to their successors only just so much as they were disposed to write, and no more. And that such inundations, pestilences, and famines occur cannot be doubted, both because all history is full of accounts of them, and because we see the effects of them in the oblivion of things, and also because it seems reasonable that they should occur. For in nature as in simple bodies, when there is an accumulation of superfluous matter, a spontaneous purgation takes place, which preserves the health of that body. And so it is with that compound body, the human race; when countries become overpopulated and there is no longer any room for all the inhabitants to live, nor any other places for them to go to, these being likewise all fully occupied—and when human cunning and wickedness have gone as far as they can go—then of necessity the world must relieve itself of this excess of population by one of those three causes; so that mankind, having been chastised and reduced in numbers, may become better and live with more convenience. Tuscany then, as I have said above, was once powerful, religious, and virtuous; it had its own customs and language; but all this was destroyed by the Roman power, so that there remained nothing of it but the memory of its name.

Strauss: In the first place at the very beginning of this chapter you would have seen that he refers to philosophers. So he knew something of philosophers and the particular point he has in mind here is that there are philosophers who teach that the world, this world inhabited by human beings, lasts forever. What is the very beginning?

Blanton: “To those philosophers who maintain that the world has existed from eternity, we might reply, that, if it were really of such antiquity, there would reasonably be some record beyond five thousand years.”

Strauss: Who are these philosophers who say that?

Blanton: I think immediately of Aristotle.

Strauss: Sure, the Aristotelians, vulgarly called Averroists, i.e., the unbelieving Aristotelians. They said the visible universe is eternal and man has always generated man, there never was a first man. What does Machiavelli say? He replies to them.

Blanton: He says that there are various causes for the records of human beings being lost and that any man who speaks in terms of eternity is justly laughed at or justly put down, I guess.

Strauss: But still, when you read it without any distrust of Machiavelli, you would say he tries to refute this antibiblical argument, but in fact he supports it. He says: this were true if there were no ruin of documents, therefore the antibiblical Aristotelian argument is not refuted. That means in the context: that’s a solid argument.

Blanton: But he refers to the one historian who gives an account of forty or fifty thousand years...

Strauss: All right, Diodorus Siculus. But is he not trustworthy because he speaks of forty or fifty thousand years, or because he adopts all kinds of old women’s tales he picked up in Egypt, where he came from?

Blanton: The latter, I suppose.

Strauss: Yes, so that is not very helpful. But there is another point which we have to consider here. These causes of ruin of what they now call civilizations by war and such things, he calls human causes. And what are the divine causes? But what is true of the ruin is of course also true of the originations of *sects*—that was a favorite term of the Averroists for religion. Sects have their origin not in divine acts but in human acts.

Student: Not revelation.

Strauss: Not revelation proper. *Ja*. That is one of the most revealing chapters in the whole book, the whole *Discourses*. Now this I may link up with... The *Discourses* is about four or five times as long as *The Prince* and is much richer in matter than *The Prince*, much more difficult to understand also. I can only give you one little help towards this understanding: The fifth chapter of the second book, which we just read, is the sixty-fifth chapter of the whole work, the first book consisting of sixty chapters. Sixty-five is as you may easily figure out a multiple of thirteen: 5×13 . That is one principle of Machiavelli's writing, the number thirteen. *The Prince*, a book much easier to understand, consists of twenty-six chapters and twenty-six is more obviously a multiple of thirteen than sixty-five is. That is a long a question: Why did he pick this strange number? That is a question into which I cannot go because it would have to do all kinds of strange things which would remind more of doings of alchemists than of students of Machiavelli. So we'd better forgo that.

At any rate, book 2, chapter 5 of the *Discourses* is the most obviously cosmological chapter of the *Discourses* with the possible exception of the proemium of book 3, where he doesn't give any details but where he speaks of the unchangeability of the natural order. Now let us have another discussion, for the same reason for which I had to propose a discussion a short while ago.

Student: Of course, to agree with Averroes on a certain point does not necessarily mean to be an Averroist. He might agree with regard to the possible eternity of the universe but he might not agree with theological first cause, for example.

Strauss: *Ja*, that is true. But the question is how deeply had Machiavelli studied these kinds of things. That's a question to which I believe no one has the answer. The second point which was already mentioned is that we know a bit of Machiavelli's philosophical studies: his study of Lucretius. The copy of Lucretius which he copied and in which he inserted some emendations of his own is still in existence. But more specifically the Averroistic teaching, however much it might differ from Aristotle's own teaching, was surely a teleological teaching. And there is no place for teleology in Machiavelli, there is no place for teleology in Lucretius. And therefore I believe the most cautious suggestion one could make is this: the natural philosophy on which Machiavelli builds is a decayed Aristotelianism somehow under the influence of Epicurus. I couldn't with a good conscience go beyond this very unsatisfactory formulation.

Student: What about the possibility of identifying nature with *fortuna*. Could nature be called *fortuna*? Would that be another name for nature?

Strauss: No, it is not possible. Because the orderliness which belongs to nature does not belong to *fortuna*. For example, you have two ears, that is our nature. But that there are from time to time people who have only one ear, that's *fortuna*.

Student: He speaks of purgation in this fifth chapter [of book 2].

Strauss: That is correct. That is a kind of teleology.

Student: That is also a kind of *fortuna*.

Strauss: No, on the contrary. That is order. There is a certain overpopulation, taking place from time to time. And then coming with that overpopulation, immorality—say, cannibalism. And then something must be done by nature, [i.e.,] teleology. And therefore wars are an important part of natural economy: to get rid of the danger of overpopulation. That is an argument we find in medieval Averroists, for example Marsilius of Padua, that wars are very important for that purpose, to prevent overpopulation. That is true, there a kind of teleology implied in that.

Student: The difficulty is of course that a war, a plague, a flood seem to be interpretable as for the sake of ridding us of excess population. But they don't seem to be natural in the sense of being always or for the most part. They seem to be chance.

Strauss: *Ja*, this is true. I see now, there is a variety of considerations coming there together. Because what Machiavelli is doing in chapter 5 of book 2 is to present his very heretical view in as respectable a guise as possible. And therefore he brings in the flood; flood which is after all not only a teaching of pagan philosophers but of the Bible itself. Machiavelli uses that for his own purposes, that such floods lead to destruction of all monuments of the earlier times and no wonder that there is no argument available proving that the world is older than five thousand and so hundred years. [inaudible]

Student: That seems to suggest that Noah was an ignorant mountaineer.

Strauss: *Ja*, that is also true. That is not good for Noah. That is true, but it corresponds to what Plato says on the same subject in the *Laws*: people who don't read and write and therefore can't leave documents by which you can prove anything....

Strauss: [in progress] Just as here a wholly nonpolitical man establishes an illicit relation with a woman, in an immoral manner, but in a way which some people would find charming, the same is done by a prince who establishes his power by illicit means and yet one cannot simply condemn him, according to Machiavelli. You may have read the article by Harvey Mansfield; he has written an article on the *Mandragola* from this point of view.²⁸ There was an international meeting somewhere in Italy on Machiavelli and he wrote about that. There is a parallel between *Mandragola* and the political writings but a parallel is something different: these are not political people. Machiavelli has a formula for that; when he speaks of Lorenzo de' Medici he says he had a quasi-impossible combination of gravity and levity.²⁹ Gravity—politics; levity—love. Two entirely different provinces, akin because they are both human, and yet radically different. That is one reason why I would hesitate calling Machiavelli a hedonist.

Student: Another question about the character of the prince: I remember in a reading of the *Republic* being struck by the guardians being compared to dogs, that is, friendly to the citizens and angry at any foreigner, and I remember at the time thinking that's hard to understand, how a man could train himself to be both vicious and compassionate. But it seems to me even harder to understand in Machiavelli because at least in the *Republic* or in a city in the way that the ancients talk about it there is a fatherland, there is a strict definition somehow of who a proper citizen is. But in the terms of Machiavelli it seems that the citizens that the prince would be friendly to are not necessarily those within his city but some people appear, maybe in the city maybe out of the city.

Strauss: Not quite. I haven't made statistics of the use of *patria* in Machiavelli but that goes without saying that the political society is a fatherland.³⁰ There may be some marginal cases where these two things do not coincide but as a rule they coincide. I don't believe that you will find a crucial difference there.

Student: It seemed that the prince is potentially vicious towards everyone, there is no one that stands outside of the possibility of being sliced up.

²⁸ Harvey C. Mansfield, "The Cuckold in Machiavelli's *Mandragola*," in *The Comedy and Tragedy of Machiavelli: Essays on the Literary Works*, ed. Vickie B. Sullivan (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 1–30.

²⁹ *Florentine Histories*, 8.36.

³⁰ But see Leo Strauss, "Machiavelli's Intention: *The Prince*," *American Political Science Review* 51, no. 1 (1957): 36.

Strauss: Yes, if he doesn't behave. But if he behaves why should he slice him up? Is it not better, as Socrates even put it, to use him alive than to kill him and only have the trouble of having him buried?³¹

Student: The only thing is that it sounds like the analogy is between the dog and the prince, but actually it is between the prince and the master of the dog who directs the dog on as to who the enemies and who the friends are.

Strauss: But why does Plato introduce the example of the dogs there in the second book? What is the purpose, the comparison of the guardian with a dog?

Student: I am not sure.

Strauss: A very obvious phenomenon: the simple man identifies the fellow citizen with a friend and the foreigner is a damned foreigner. That is universal and therefore the people who are the defenders par excellence, the guardians, they must have this to a higher degree. From ordinary experience, we all know how easy the combination is and Socrates puts in a way that it seems to be very paradoxical so that he can solve it only by going outside of the human sphere and bring in the dogs, you know, as if there were no human examples for that. The joke which he makes is really this: that he calls dogs the philosophic animal because the dogs make a distinction between friends and foes with a view to knowledge. Those they know they call friends and those they do not know they call enemies, and since they take their bearings by knowledge they are philosophic animals. In fact they are just the opposite of philosophers.

Student: I don't think I see why.

Strauss: Well, a philosopher would not say that the mere fact that a man is an alien makes him an enemy.

Student: Is the *Mandragola* an example of ministerial poetry or is there such a thing in Machiavelli?

Strauss: No, I mean you can put it this way, you can say there is a sphere of politics which is the most magnificent and impressive sphere which exists for most people, for Machiavelli especially. But there is something else and this can be loosely described as the sphere of levity; because politics, that is great, think only of war which belongs to politics, gravity. And love, levity.

³¹ Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.2.11.

[Strauss thumps on the table for emphasis.] Is this clear? So you can say, although it is to take some liberties, but it is not wholly irrational to say that the *Mandragola* and similar works of Machiavelli deal with the nonpolitical, with the transpolitical to the extent to which Machiavelli is willing to deal with that. Did I make myself understood?

Student: Would there then be any political role for comedy or tragedy, or poetry in general?

Strauss: Machiavelli never spoke about that, he wrote something about Dante and Boccaccio but not about tragedy and comedy as such. Surely he would say that, but his business was to write the *Discorsi* and *Mandragola* and related things.

Student: But *Mandragola* is the problem for me. I can't understand how the *Mandragola* being comic but also to a certain extent dealing with things that would have great gravity. . .

Strauss: No, that cannot be called grave.

Student: Political aspects of it as Dr. Mansfield thought so.

Strauss: The point is that it is not political. You mean its kinship, in the parallelism with politics. Is that what you mean? All right.

Student: One could also say there is a kind of presentation of what might be called the ethical doctrine of *The Prince* insofar as it gives you examples of how virtue is to be used. Callimanco could never have succeeded if he hadn't been taught or learned how to use the virtues of *The Prince* on the mother and others.

Strauss: But princes are warned by Machiavelli to be particularly cautious regarding the womenfolk of their subjects.³² So the Machiavellian prince precisely if he is very Machiavellian would never do this kind of thing. He had so many opportunities apart from that, there is no good reason for it.

Student: There is no way to answer that and remain decent, there is no way to try to argue with that and remain decent.

Strauss: *Ja*, probably, yes. What was the name of that woman, the ancestress of William the Conqueror? Or was it the wife of his... The woman in Bayeux, whom the Norman nobleman saw doing her laundry in the river

³² Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chap. 17.

there. And then took her on his horse and rode away with her. Was she the mother of William the Conqueror? There is such a story, a true story. But I forgot the exact relation. Maybe the wife of William the Conqueror, I think he got into trouble with that boy later on who came from this relation. So you see it is not advisable, even if you are William the Conqueror, to do that.³³

Student: You suggested that there is an affinity between Hobbes, Spinoza, and Machiavelli.

Strauss: That depends a bit on the point of view. There is a great affinity if you compare Machiavelli and Hobbes taken together with Plato and Aristotle, there is no question. But if you take Hobbes on his own terms and Machiavelli on his own terms, then you can say however anti-Platonic and anti-Aristotelian they may be, they are so different that it is of no use to bring them together, it is in no way enlightening to bring them together. That was a view which I held for many years. But then eventually I reached the view that they really belong together and Hobbes's silence on Machiavelli doesn't mean anything. It was a general rule of policy not to mention the name of Machiavelli. Let me see, the first man who mentioned Machiavelli, his enemies of course mention him all the time, but the first man who was not an enemy of Machiavelli, was this strange man, a Belgian, a professor at Leuven, what was his name? He changed his religion according to the political order, when the Protestants were in ascendancy he was a Protestant, and when the Catholics were in ascendancy he was a Catholic, he was a very famous man—oh, Justus Lipsius! Well known in the literature as the founder of the neo-Stoic school and he wrote textbooks of politics based partly on Machiavelli and partly... how the Stoics come in I do not know, I had a student who wanted to write his doctoral dissertation on how the Stoics came into this mixture but he never finished his dissertation, he went into academic administration, which is I believe the death of doctoral dissertations in many cases. Yes, Justus Lipsius. He was in his way an important man, not only on account of Machiavelli, but he was also a correspondent of Montaigne. Because when you take the *Essays* of Montaigne which consists also of three books, there are certain external similarities between the *Essays* and Machiavelli's *Discourses*, which I never understood, but this relation with Justus Lipsius suggested something to me. Of course, Bacon speaks of Machiavelli with a certain respect, he calls him one of the doctors of Italy,³⁴ which is a beautiful epithet for Machiavelli I

³³ The story is that of Herleva of Falaise, mother of William the Conqueror.

³⁴ In *The Essays*, "Of Goodness and Goodness of Nature."

believe. Bacon praised him, with a certain criticism, but he praised him. But as a rule people blamed him, especially his enemies. But in the second half of the seventeenth century he was established as a European celebrity; so Spinoza speaks of him with high regard, but Spinoza was himself a rather dubious fellow, and therefore that was not an unqualified compliment, for Machiavelli to be praised by Spinoza. And in the eighteenth century then I think this was over, Machiavelli was accepted. Although Frederick the Great still thought it good to write a book called *Anti-Machiavelli* which he wrote immediately before he started with his Machiavellian actions. Which is of course sign of a deep understanding for Machiavelli. But Hobbes, not so strangely because Hobbes was in a way a very cautious man, never mentions Machiavelli, as far as I know, and the only proof I have is that I looked up the indices of the English and the Latin works and the name Machiavelli doesn't occur. I have never gone over the whole texts of Hobbes to see whether he mentions or does not mention Machiavelli. That could be a good term paper. [inaudible]

Student: I am bothered a little bit by this idea of trying to give some kind of moral justification for the prince as the founder of a political order. I wanted you develop that a little bit further. I wonder, how can one call it a moral act if the primary consideration on the part of a founder is a completely self-regarding thing?

Strauss: All right, take a man who is wholly unselfish, wholly altruistic as they say. And he sees that his fellow men cannot live decently together except in civil society under laws with teeth in them. Is this a moral thought? I mean good, just laws are of course enforced laws. All right, then he must get the power to make such laws.

Student: I am not concerned with the actions so much. Perhaps he has to do terrible things in order to do it. What I am asking about more is in terms of his own motivation.

Strauss: How does Aristotle in his wisdom say? The intentions are immanifest.³⁵ No human being can know what the intentions are. But you see certain actions presented to you in a certain light and that is blameless. Such is the way in which we humans have to judge.

Student: Let me ask you a slightly different question: would you say that this is a beginning of the notion of the invisible hand?

³⁵ Aristotle, *Nic. Eth.* 1178a30.

Strauss: Why should a particularly... There are so many beginnings for that.

Student: Because it seems to me that the argument there is that somehow the self-regarding passions turn out to be good for society.

Strauss: I was not thinking of self-regarding, I was thinking of a man who is wholly other-regarding and for this reason feels that he or someone who listens to his advice has to come to power to lay down good laws and have them enforced. The question of self- and other-regarding does not come up in my argument. You see, there is a thing which is called utopianism, did you ever hear that word? There is an argument made against utopianism that this precisely is immoral because it disregards the circumstances and the complexities; to put it in a different way, the man who considers the circumstances, he is a moral man. I mean it depends, there can be of course people who are very unscrupulous and derive pleasure from their unscrupulousness, men like Bismarck, who still are clever enough if need be to present their immoral actions as prompted by moral motives. I am not speaking of this kind of man, I am speaking of honest men. But I think we have sometimes examples in this country of this dualism: of moral politics immorally motivated, and, in a circumstance, immoral politics morally motivated. That is complicated.

Student: Could you say more about that? Immoral politics morally motivated, an example?

Strauss: No, I never speak about politics.

[Laughter]

Strauss: But I think the last elections were quite instructive.³⁶

[Laughter]

Student: I am still worried a little bit, [inaudible], it would seem that the Machiavellian resort to prudence and the calculation as to what characteristic is to be employed in a given situation resolves itself into unprincipled behavior, so flexible...

Strauss: Yes, sure, that is perfectly correct, Machiavelli is unprincipled because he thinks you should use both virtue and vice just as circumstances recommend. But there is a principle here, indicated by his use of the word

³⁶ In the presidential election of 1972, President Richard M. Nixon won reelection, carrying forty-nine of fifty states. He defeated Democratic candidate George McGovern.

virtù. *Virtù* consists in using both virtue and vice as circumstances recommend. He questions the principles of morality, without any question.

Student: I have trouble understanding how a man could operate so flexibly and still conceive of himself as an identifiable thing and therefore be peaceful with himself. In that sense...

Strauss: Why do people employ tax lawyers? I believe because there are so-called loopholes and some loopholes are permitted and some loopholes are forbidden. A decent man would not use forbidden loopholes but he would use—most of them, surely, would use permitted loopholes. But permitted loopholes are not something in between forbidden loopholes and something which is perfectly straightforward? Does this not apply to other human actions, that there are borderline cases? And especially if one's enemies come in, would this not be a further complicating factor?

Student: Are you in effect saying that Plato's argument against tyranny really has no practical bearing? Because it seems to me that his hypothetic argument is that somehow tyranny, tyrannical man is always in some way fundamentally dissatisfied.

Strauss: And to which I can only give an equally general answer: in the moment you show me the possibility of the philosopher-king I accept your argument. But if the philosopher-king is a problematic being, his opposite pole, the tyrant, is also a problematic being. I mean you don't have to convince me that a tyrant is an abominable creature, I only have to read Suetonius's life of Nero if I am not satisfied with what I read about Stalin or Hitler to see that. Terrible. But the question is whether the complete absence of any admixture of the opposite, tyranny, is possible. If Nero stands at the nude corpse of his mother and he had her murdered and says, I didn't know that I had such a beautiful mother!³⁷ Wonderful boy, huh?! But that is not a typical action of tyrants, because it is a wholly unpolitical action, complete senseless misuse of the power which he had and which he was unable to use properly. There is no possible justification.

I hate to return to the subject with which I opened today's meeting, that owing to my bad bodily condition I was not able to elaborate a lecture on Machiavelli and to have a discussion as I would have loved to have. I must now terminate it, because I am too tired, I am very sorry, but it can't be helped. But it was very nice meeting you.

³⁷ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 62.14.2.

Roger Scruton, *On Human Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017, 151 pp., \$22.90 (hardcover).

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On Human Nature is not Roger Scruton's most profound philosophical book, which would probably be either *Sexual Desire: A Moral Philosophy of the Erotic* (1986), largely ignored in academia, or the more recent *The Soul of the Word* (2016). But *On Human Nature* is certainly Scruton's most beautiful piece. It is a short book, at merely 144 small pages, based on a series of lectures he gave in the fall of 2103 at Princeton. This "revised version of the three Charles E. Test memorial lectures," to which he adds an additional lecture on reverence, is "at best," as he himself states, an abridged version of his ideas; he does not attempt to deal with the obvious difficulties into which the reader may stumble. The book is therefore a summary, one that points toward the more extensive *The Soul of the Word* or that looks ahead to "later attempts."

Scruton is a famous (or infamous) British writer and philosopher, member of the Royal Institute and fellow at several other think tanks. He is also a self-exiled scholar, living in the countryside, but one who nonetheless enjoys a regular presence in newspaper headlines and publishing houses for writing on a variety of subjects: art in general and music in particular; modern philosophy in general and Spinoza and Kant in particular; but also notorious dead and living intellectuals, novelists and composers, the Cold War and the fallacies of Communism, to mention just a few. He feels more at home, however, when writing against the current on subjects such as animal rights (where we find his deepest reflections on personhood), global warming (where we find his deepest reflections on cosmology), hunting (where

we find his deepest thoughts on animals), wine, culture, and education, old nations and the birth of the new federal European republic—that is, “against” any imaginable politically correct view that should indeed be questioned if we want to avoid the pervasive conformism that has taken over contemporary academia. This constant challenging of the dominant views of our increasingly secularist society made him an “enfant terrible” that some find immensely entertaining, and others altogether outrageous. The truth is, he might be both.

According to his own moving account in *Gentle Regrets*, this did not come naturally to Scruton. Faced with the turmoil in France of May 1968, he decided to become a conservative and, finding that the British conservative tradition was curiously lacking, he resorted to a bouquet of many thinkers such as Edmund Burke, Michael Oakeshott, and T. S. Eliot, among others.

Notwithstanding, born and raised in Oxford and trained in analytical philosophy, he never abandoned his conviction that all there is, or all that philosophy can deal with, is what language can allow us to talk about (Ryle, Ayer, Brentano, and even Russell remain his main philosophical references). He also asserts, in *A Short History of Modern Philosophy*, the fruitfulness of the “standpoint of analytical philosophy” (*Short History*, vii) and of the late Wittgenstein’s antiprivate view of language (*On Human Nature*, 53, etc.). Moreover, he sees “the main current in modern philosophy as springing from the Cartesian theory of the subject, and from the consequent divorce between subject and object” (*Short History*, viii). This current, he argues, runs through all modern philosophy, up to “Wittgenstein’s detailed demonstration of the untenability of the Cartesian vision” that, by the same token, discredited modern phenomenology and brought “a period of philosophical history to an end” (ix). Despite occasional quotes from Plato or Aristotle, Scruton never even considered the possibility of a return to greener pastures. We will see how this deep-rooted conviction makes of *On Human Nature* an amazing book in its attempt to overcome this straitjacket, but also how this sets clear limits on the book’s achievements: Scruton often finds himself falling into the pitfalls of positivism and historicism.

First and foremost, *On Human Nature* is a surprising book because it asserts that there is such a thing as human nature, an obvious biological truth that has nonetheless been questioned by every current of historicism, from Burke’s questioning of the natural man to Foucault’s more recent “discourses” (13). Burke considered the rights of man as unreal as unicorns or witches—and he opposed to them the rights of Englishman, Frenchman,

and German—while Foucault’s discourses “aimed at discrediting common prejudice” about our “essence” (14). It is also immensely salutary that Scruton’s approach begins with the statement that humankind has not only the (partial) nature of an animal, but also the nature of an (embodied) person (30)—in opposition to all Kantian, Hegelian, and merely poetical attempts to begin with the human consciousness. In this way, Scruton avoids all reductionist attempts at explaining the higher out of the lower or, in other words, all easy dissolutions of man into evolutionary, Freudian, sociologizing (Marxist et al.), and other simplifying schemes.

On Human Nature is composed of four chapters: “Human Kind” (1–49); “Human Relations” (50–79); “The Moral Life” (80–112); and a later-added chapter “Sacred Obligations” (113–44). The largest by far is the first one. There, Scruton shows the limits of attempts at explaining man through evolutionary psychology. Resorting to ethology, game theory, the role of *Lebensraum* (9), *Rigoletto* (10), Kant’s famous analysis of laughter (19–25), and the smile of a face painted on a canvas (30–34), Scruton ends by countering all reductionist views of man with his peculiar view of intentionality and personhood (34–49). One possible reading of this book is, therefore, a (somewhat desperate or, on the contrary, hope and faith-filled [see 47–49]) effort to rescue man from all those who believe that evolutionary psychology provides the only scientific and, therefore, the only true explanation of the behavior of man.

The next chapter, “Human Relations,” draws on Kant and especially on Darwall’s “second-person standpoint” (50). Using with some freedom Martin Buber’s “I-Thou” terminology, Scruton here resorts to two arguments: a first that is based on language (i.e., Wittgenstein: see 53) where he asserts that, without the other, an intimate and untransferable feeling such as “I am in pain” would be a meaningless statement; and a second that is based on a somewhat cavalier Hegelian account of self-awareness (53–55). The Hegelian recognition accorded to the self by the other is then equated to Kant’s paralogisms of pure reason (*Critique of Pure Reason*, part 2, chapter 1) and to Husserl’s phenomenology. The fecundity of this particular combination of I-Thou existentialism (we are by the regard of the other), together with Wittgenstein’s contention that the privilege of the I belongs to the grammar of self-reference (68), is demonstrated *ad oculus* in a leisurely comment on desire (69) and the decentering of the passions of the soul (71–75) in sexual relationships and in art (Giorgione’s *Tempest* being the example: see 76–77).

The core of Scruton’s view of man is briefly presented through the idea of “personhood,” here taken much farther than a mere juridical concept

(more on this at the end). Nevertheless, the conflation of so many different and opposed philosophies (Boethius and Locke, e.g.: see 76) makes the book prey to accusations of inconsistency and contradictions. Scruton wonders: “Should we be worried by this? My answer is no. The possibility of divergence between our two ways of counting people...does not subvert the practices that have been built on those rival schemes” (78).

The third chapter is an extension of the previous one. Scruton here searches for a foundation for “morality,” but without ever explaining what morality is. The main distinction here is between “stuff” and “things.” Contrarily to water, Scruton’s horse Desmond cannot be cut in two, or he would lose his individuality (81–82): “things” have a deep individuality. Nonetheless, Scruton says, there are animal “things” that have awareness but lack self-awareness, that is, the capacity to praise, blame, and forgive, all actions that only self-aware things can *will*. Scruton however points to an exception: pollution and taboo in the Greek tragedies; in other words, there are offenses that do not depend on our will (thus the example of Oedipus, the offense imposed on him by the gods, Oedipus’s sense of *pollution*, contamination, and his final acceptance of the punishment) (86–88). Such a case allows him to grant some “measure of historical variation” (88), the essential features of morality being universal, but with enough margin to ground the “moral community” (89) of the Anglo-Saxon practices of common law (90) and the general theories of moral sentiment from Adam Smith to Peter Singer, but also the theories of Parfit and others “who speak for our times” (92) through their lifeboat and trolley dilemmas (92–96). Once more, all this syncretism could confuse the reader if Scruton had not spelled out his “fundamental intuition”: that morality exists (in part) because it allows us to live with others through negotiation (98). Even Aristotle’s *Ethics* is but a showcase of how morality or ethics really means taking full responsibility for our own actions and making reasons “my reasons” (101), a consequence of a constructivist approach to morality, based on the I-Thou relationship. Should we be concerned about the fact that Aristotle, Kant, and the Bible are all present in very different or even “rival schemes”? Scruton’s answer is again: no. Virtues, he grants, are “not available outside a tightly woven social context,” although, according to him, virtues are not hard to understand, but hard only to practice.

As we noted, the final chapter is a newcomer. Scruton here criticizes all egalitarianism that upholds a benevolent conception of the state (114): such positions, he argues, fail to take into account our embodied selves (the example, again, being erotic love) and the fact that they are based on what, in *The Uses of Pessimism*, Scruton dubs the “born free” fallacy: noumenal selves

do not come to the world, we are born in a world of encumbered ties and attachments (116). Scruton's attempt to challenge these two objections make the most interesting part of the book, although it comes late (117–25 are on sexual desire and 125–43 are about religion and the moral life).

Scruton says that “we are not entitled to reify the self as a distinctive object of reference” (*On Human Nature*, 33), which means that the subject “is not part of the empirical world” and does not exist in “another realm” (32). But we may wonder, “is the subject a real part of the real world?” The question, Scruton argues, is “misconstrued,” since language does not support it. The self is an “emergent feature of the organism” (37), like colors on a canvas, and no other input is required but the biology of the body (38). There is no “impassable gap” between man and other animals: Wallace is wrong and Darwin is right (cf. 14 with 66). “From Plato to Sartre,” many thinkers presented different views of this idea, but they almost all “agreed in searching for a philosophical account rather than a scientific account” (28). In fact, “we are objects, caught in the currents of causality” (66–67) and if our responses to others seem to aim at a horizon that “passes beyond the body,” to the being that incarnates, this is no more than a “compelling” illusion that is the root of the “idea of the soul, of the true but hidden self that is veiled by the flesh” (67).

In the end, Scruton is very much a modern man, for whom a philosophy opposed to the account of science (32) is just a *façon de parler* (40). As veiled in the flesh as the soul is, the hidden assumption here is that all that (modern, obviously) philosophy can do is speculate about how we talk about “things” and “stuff.” By taking as our starting point modern philosophy and modern language, however, we might be simply clarifying and making increasingly more formal and exact our own prejudices. Philosophy per se is not historical, but today's philosophy could perhaps begin by undertaking a (Socratic) examination of the works that constitute the history of philosophy: there we can find the sources of our confused, contradictory current opinions that pervade our common language. Scruton takes as good some kind of Averroistic double truth that is also suggested here, in passing, as congenial to modern philosophy (48): he believes that science as we know it leaves something unexplained, but the solution is to be found in a supplement of poetical and philosophical account of human things.

Whatever flaws we may find in this book, we should not make the mistake of thinking them too important. Even the book's most obvious inconsistencies and silences are mere ink spills on a beautifully painted canvas. Scruton's unfailing humanity pervades all its pages.

Thom Brooks and Martha C. Nussbaum, eds., *Rawls's Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, viii + 206 pp., \$32 (paperback), \$95 (hardcover).

Jon Mandle and David A. Reidy, eds., *The Cambridge Rawls Lexicon*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, xxiii + 897 pp., \$175 (hardcover).

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Do John Rawls's ideas continue to matter? I was recently told by the editor of an important academic journal that nobody wants to publish works on Rawls anymore. I imagine this particular editor does not speak for all gatekeepers to academic journals and books, but even if he is correct that publishers are tiring of Rawls scholarship, plenty of scholars remain interested enough in Rawls to continue writing and reading about his contributions to political theory. The collection of essays edited by Thom Brooks and Martha Nussbaum titled *Rawls's Political Liberalism* and the encyclopedic volume of Rawlsian thought assembled by Jon Mandle and David Reidy for *The Cambridge Rawls Lexicon* provide ample evidence that interest in Rawls is alive and well.

Perhaps if Rawls had given us only his 1971 book *A Theory of Justice* we would have reason to think his ideas to be of historic interest, but not particularly weighty in contemporary discussions of political theory. But Rawls continued thinking through his argument and, much to his credit, responded to many critics in the years following *Theory*, which eventually led to the publication in 1993 of *Political Liberalism* along with a host of other essays and lectures at the end of his career, all of which help to keep Rawls's ideas relevant among students of political philosophy and, more generally, political scientists

and legal scholars. The importance of Rawls's broad appeal should not be underestimated, and it is worth recognizing that Thom Brooks and Martha Nussbaum, though their backgrounds are in political philosophy, both currently hold appointments in law schools; Brooks teaches in the law program at Durham University and Nussbaum splits her time between the philosophy department and the law school at the University of Chicago. Appropriately, the essays in their book focus not on *Theory* but on *Political Liberalism*.

The occasion for Brooks and Nussbaum to edit a volume examining the legacy of Rawls's ideas is in fact the twentieth (though by the time the book went to press it was the twenty-second) anniversary of *Political Liberalism*. About a quarter of the book consists of a long introduction by Nussbaum, after which appear essays by Onora O'Neill, Paul Weithman, Jeremy Waldron, Thom Brooks, and Frank Michelman. As with most volumes, each essay is an independent argument and does not really speak to the other essays, which makes it difficult to say what the book adds up to. Each chapter, including Nussbaum's introduction, is largely interpretative rather than descriptive of Rawls's latter work, but the interpretations offer differing accounts of *Political Liberalism's* purpose and importance. All the essays are generally favorable to Rawlsian principles and all but one embrace Rawls's style of political philosophy.

Nussbaum's introduction to the book is difficult to categorize. The word "introduction" does not adequately capture what goes on in the first fifty-plus pages of the book. Nussbaum opens with an account of *Political Liberalism's* importance and then moves on to offer a brief account of Rawls's main ideas, his books' engagement with the history of political philosophy, the development of his ideas, revisions he was not able to complete prior to his death, various critiques or interpretations that have been put forward by scholars, and a handful of ways in which she thinks his work needs to be improved upon. Nussbaum's prose is clear, something one wishes to see more of among those who write on Rawls, but there are reasons to be wary of trusting her as a reliable guide to Rawls's thought. She is trying to do so much in the opening pages of the book that nothing aside from the prose's clarity is done to the full satisfaction of the reader. One who expects a refresher on Rawls's main ideas, for example, will be met with a "focus on a small number of issues," some of which are clearly of more interest to Nussbaum than to Rawls, such as the place of the family in liberal thought (1).

The other sections of Nussbaum's opening essay are likewise interesting but on the whole not fully convincing, especially the section on the history of political philosophy. It opens promisingly enough, with the claim that

Political Liberalism is an “extended rejoinder” to Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, but this claim, insightful as it could be, is an assertion without much in the way of detailed evidence or examples (10). Given the nature of an introduction, the broad-brush approach is understandable and could be forgiven if not for the fact that Nussbaum’s painting of Hobbes presents if not a false picture, then a highly skewed one. Without much explanation she depicts Hobbes as a divine-right theorist, ignoring the important role that consent plays in the establishment of a social compact, an irony given the fact that consent is on display in the one sentence she quotes from *Leviathan* (11). Further troubling is her account of Locke’s *Letter Concerning Toleration*, in which she greatly softens Locke’s exclusion of Catholics from the general duty of tolerating religious belief (11).

Perhaps Hobbes is a divine-right theorist and perhaps Locke did mean for his readers to tolerate Catholics, but these are debatable points that Nussbaum presents as straightforward readings, leading one to wonder how reliable she is in her presentation of Rawls. For example, when she claims that the duty of civility (which is the basis of public reason) is a moral ideal without legal status, and that “there is absolutely no question of citizens being restricted in their speech, or given lower civic status, on account of their non-observance of this ethical duty,” one has to wonder why Rawls is never *this* clear about the matter. What Nussbaum offers as a factual account of Rawls is really an interpretation. Perhaps her reading is plausible, but it seems only just to acknowledge that Rawls leaves some room for doubt about the legal status of public reason; indeed, he seems to suggest that laws are legitimate, which is to say constitutional, only when consistent with public reason. Instead of acknowledging that room for debate exists on this point, Nussbaum suggests parenthetically that those who worry that Rawls means for public reason to have some legal teeth, presumably enforced by the Supreme Court, have “misunderstood the nature of Rawls’s recommendation” (33). I for one am not sure they have, but I acknowledge it is a debatable point. One wishes as much from the book’s editor in her introduction.

The first, more focused essay of the book is by Onora O’Neill, professor emeritus at Cambridge University, who wrote her dissertation under the direction of Rawls at Harvard. Her chapter provides a general comparison of her former teacher’s two major works. *Theory*, she explains, is more abstract and contractarian, focused as it is on a conceptual framework of justice. *Political Liberalism*, by contrast, argues that principles of justice can be constructed with reference to an existing political culture using reasonable procedures.

The latter approach emphasizes the importance of citizenship, a geographically bounded polity, democratic institutions, and general acceptance of liberal ideas. O'Neill finds the development in Rawls's thinking troubling insofar as its context is internal to a specific political entity and leaves little room for sharing a global consensus on justice among nations, or peoples. In other words Rawls's later work is less universal than his earlier work and O'Neill ends by suggesting that we make a return to the Rawls of *Theory*.

In his essay Paul Weithman, another student of Rawls who now teaches philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, argues that *Theory* and *Political Liberalism* are not as far apart as most scholars believe. Contrary to O'Neill's account, Weithman maintains that Rawls remains fully committed to the principles of justice as presented in *Theory*. The purpose of *Political Liberalism* is not to recast the principles or their defense, but only to revise the account of stability from part 3 of *Theory*. On Weithman's telling, what appears to be a turn from justice to political legitimacy and constitutionalism in the latter half of Rawls's career should not be interpreted as a compromise of his hopes or a backing away from the egalitarian demands of the difference principle, which would allow difference in wealth only when it works to the advantage of those who have less. The more mature Rawls, Weithman explains, remains committed to the ideals of his earlier career, with a more plausible means of persuading those disinclined to accept *justice as fairness*, the name he gives to his abstract liberal theory, to at least recognize the importance of a shared conception of justice for settling important political questions. Rawls is a far more consistent thinker in Weithman's view than in O'Neill's.

The essay most critical of Rawls comes from Jeremy Waldron of the New York University School of Law. Waldron limits his argument to a discussion of public reason, but his comments have implications for Rawls's particular style of political philosophy. Interestingly, Waldron does not rehearse Rawls's theoretical account of public reason directly; rather, he attempts to arrive at how it might look in practice. He narrows his discussion to Nussbaum's position, that public reason is a moral ideal rather than a legal requirement, but even as an ethical standard he finds it problematic insofar as it relies on an unrealistic understanding of human motives in political life. People accept or desire laws for all kinds of reasons, many of which cannot be widely shared, and it is difficult to imagine why we should expect anything different. Additionally, Waldron takes issue with the claim that many of the reasons people might want to raise in support of a law, such as religious reasons, cannot be widely understood in a large pluralist polity like the United States. Just because a

reason is not held in common does not mean it cannot be understood, and reciprocity ought to require as much from the listener as the speaker when it comes to public discussions. In short, the range of publicly acceptable reasons for or against laws ought to be far broader than Rawls allows.

Waldron's critique of public reason, as mentioned above, points to a much larger concern he has with the type of political philosophy that Rawls and many of his students advocate. Rawls limits political philosophy to the practical role of identifying in the abstract principles of justice that could serve as guides of legitimacy for a democratic constitutional order. While Waldron does not deny that this approach has its uses, he worries that it truncates political philosophy to the job of judging which public reasons are legitimate while denying any role for political philosophy in determining what is in fact true. His chief example is torture. When national security is at stake, can Rawlsian public reason alone persuade the government to refrain from torturing those it suspects of having crucial information? Waldron suspects that what is needed in such a circumstance is a definitive argument that, in truth, torture is simply wrong and not simply offensive to a Rawlsian-type overlapping consensus.

The essay by Thom Brooks returns to the issue of stability, particularly the place of an overlapping consensus in achieving that stability as Rawls conceives it in his later work. Brooks argues that critics of the overlapping consensus as a source of stability usually hold one of two views. One set of critics believes that Rawls did not have to depart from *Theory* in order to shore up part 3's account of stability. The other set argues that something outside of *Theory* is in fact needed but the overlapping consensus is too fragile to do the work Rawls asks of it. Brooks holds that while neither view is entirely correct, Rawls may in fact improve upon the overlapping consensus as a device for helping to secure stability by combining it with a more robust defense of goods or capabilities guaranteed to citizens. He draws heavily here on much of Nussbaum's work. This chapter requires a broader knowledge of the secondary scholarship on Rawls than the other essays in the volume.

The concluding chapter is by Frank Michelman, professor at Harvard Law School. As I have indicated in a couple of places above, *Political Liberalism* is not simply concerned with ethical matters; Rawls wants to give his principles of justice legal backing. Michelman's chapter shows how this can in fact be done, and not surprisingly, in America, it is through the Supreme Court. Michelman asks us to consider a Rawlsian judge—Judge Rawls—who is committed to implementing the basic ideas of Philosopher Rawls. Judge Rawls

would recognize that certain basic liberties, particularly those of conscience, are fundamental and that state restrictions on these liberties are to be barred or greatly curtailed. Other liberties that are not basic are within the reach of government when it is exercising its power, in accord with Rawlsian theory, to assure the basic economic and social equality of a people. Michelman asks us to consider what Judge Rawls would do when presented with two cases, one involving a prohibition on assisted suicide and the other a mandate to purchase healthcare insurance. Using texts from *Political Liberalism*, Michelman shows us why Judge Rawls would invalidate the law against assisted suicide and uphold the law requiring everyone to purchase insurance. So much for *Political Liberalism* just being a work of ethics and not legal theory.

Taken as a whole, Brooks and Nussbaum's volume succeeds in offering scholars of Rawls a partial survey of how those inclined to agree with his main ideas understand *Political Liberalism* two decades after its publication. For someone new to the field, the book will provide a quick snapshot of six well-established scholars' views of Rawls's later career. The book's essays, however, would be difficult to follow for anyone not already thoroughly familiar with Rawls's theory and even much of the secondary literature that has been building for almost half a century.

Thankfully, acquainting oneself with Rawls's corpus and its chief interlocutors has recently become a less difficult business. Those new to Rawls, and even seasoned veterans, can benefit from Jon Mandle and David Reidy's *The Cambridge Rawls Lexicon*, which as the title suggests is an encyclopedia for those interested in learning more about the singular language and main players involved in the world of Rawls and Rawlsian scholarship. The volume contains over two hundred entries, alphabetically listed, beginning with Abortion and concluding with Ludwig Wittgenstein. The book also contains an introduction by the editors that, in fewer than ten pages, provides a very helpful biographical sketch of Rawls's life and a thematic overview of his work. A novice to Rawlsian scholarship will also benefit from the bibliography that follows the many entries as a beginning point for the vast forest they are entering.

The entries cover ideas from Rawls's theory such as Law of Peoples, themes of his work like Democracy and even Love, thinkers who influenced him such as Immanuel Kant, critics like H. L. A. Hart and Robert Nozick with whom he engaged in public discussion, and some of his more well-known students, including Samuel Freeman. Of interest given the other book reviewed here, Mandle and Reidy include an entry for Martha Nussbaum, which explains

similarities and differences in her thinking compared to that of Rawls. The entries tend to be two to four pages, though some of the more important themes, like Public Reason, are given slightly more space. Though the book has many contributors, including Frank Michelman and Paul Weithman, the entries are uniformly readable and informative.

The editors of any encyclopedic undertaking will always have to make choices about what to include, and the shape and scope of the final product will reflect those choices. I, for example, was surprised to find that the volume does not include an entry for Jürgen Habermas, though he is mentioned in several other entries. I was also hoping for an entry on Judicial Review and Political Philosophy. Both of these, to my mind, are more pertinent to Rawls's thought than the environment, which Rawls never addresses but which is nonetheless given an entry. Of course, not everything that anybody could possibly want can be included in such a volume, and there is much more of what one would expect that is included than is left out. On the whole Mandle and Reidy have assembled a very helpful guide for those wishing to better understand particular ideas or debates associated with Rawls. The entries, in brief fashion, provide a useful introduction that will aid readers of Rawls's works and the secondary literature surrounding them in the difficult task of coming to grips with a complex thinker.

All of this of course implies that we will continue living in a world where people will want to come to grips with Rawls. I think we will. The question is not so much will Rawls continue to influence students of philosophy—in their arena he may in fact be a passing trend—but whether his ideas will shape the way average citizens approach political life. It is unlikely that they will ever speak in terms of reflective equilibriums, overlapping consensuses, or comprehensive doctrines, but insofar as they accept laws and judicial decisions that reflect the ideals of Rawlsian theory, or some theory derivative of Rawls, his work will continue to be relevant and studied. That four of the six contributors to the Brooks and Nussbaum volume teach at law schools and that Cambridge University Press thought it worthwhile to publish an encyclopedia on Rawls's thought are both indications that the ideas of *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism* will remain influential for the foreseeable future.

Walter Nicgorski, *Cicero's Skepticism and His Recovery of Political Philosophy*. Recovering Political Philosophy Series. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 283 pp., \$159.00 (hardcover).

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This book is more than an addition to the growing list of scholarship over the last twenty-five to thirty years that has taken Cicero seriously as a philosopher. For one thing, the author, Walter Nicgorski, helped to pave the way for this resurgence with an essay in 1978 that broke free from the historicist mold of looking to Cicero mainly for information about Hellenistic schools of philosophy. His decades of work have come to fruition in a book that demands to be read not only by scholars of Cicero but also by those interested in natural law or the relative merits of the theoretical and practical ways of life.

Nicgorski's ambitious goal is to understand Cicero's life and thought as a whole. He maintains that Cicero's "thought about all significant matters is affected in important ways by his orientation toward action and ultimately political action of the highest sort" (5). This "practical perspective" is "an advantaged and true perspective and therefore the basis for life-directing wisdom insofar as that can be attained" (6–7). Here is Nicgorski's interpretation of the "Socratic turn," initially proclaimed by Cicero, in which Socrates "first called philosophy down from heaven" and made it address ethics and politics (*Tusculan Disputations* 5.10). From the "practical perspective," according to Nicgorski's Cicero, "the distinction between good and evil" becomes "the foundation of philosophy" (6). Nicgorski cites *On Divination* 2.2 for that claim, but in that passage Cicero avoids endorsing it by saying passively that

“the foundation of philosophy has been placed [*positum esset*] in the ends of good and bad things” without noting who placed it there.

Nicgorski cogently argues that Cicero’s skepticism is rooted in his recognition of the uncertainty of sense perception, and that his skepticism does not preclude judgments of probability that provide a basis for action, including the judgment that the highest good is virtue (16, citing *On Divination* 2.2). Although Cicero devotes a book, *Academica*, to the possibility of knowledge, Nicgorski explains, somewhat convincingly, that Cicero is concerned with complicated epistemological discussions insofar as they have practical relevance. And yet—why, as Nicgorski recognizes, did Cicero devote “unsurpassable care” to revising *Academica* for a second edition (53n80, citing *Letters to Atticus* 326)?

Cicero’s philosophizing has two “modes,” each of which is Socratic: a “critical doubting and questing spirit” and a spirit for “guiding and consoling” humans in life (60, 64). At first Nicgorski claims that the former mode is “primary, both logically and chronologically,” because the truth must be discovered before it can be applied (65). But because questing for truth always proceeds from a particular situation, the rhetorical mode may need “to precede the critical in some ways and to play an important role in stirring such inquiry” (70). It appears, then, that philosophy begins and ends in rhetoric. But does Nicgorski’s Cicero run the risk of having philosophy drown in rhetoric? In one dialogue, Cicero has Scipio Aemilianus ascribe “perfect wisdom” to Cato the Elder (*Cato the Elder on Old Age* 4). As Nicgorski admits, “Cato was no philosopher” and was even “wary” of Greek philosophers; nevertheless, he concludes that “the complete wisdom of Cicero’s Cato is the measure of complete philosophy for Cicero” (75). Nicgorski implies that philosophy contributes nothing essential to “complete wisdom.” He champions the Socratic way of life (truths applied in life) more than the Socratic method of question and answer, but apparently neither is required to take “the measure of complete philosophy.” How could Cicero agree? Nicgorski overlooks the possibility that Cicero, through his character Scipio, is telling a noble lie for the benefit of his readers. In other words, the relation of the rhetorical mode to the critical mode may be more complicated than Nicgorski admits.

Next Nicgorski turns to the subject of duties and virtue. He maintains that Cicero sees Stoicism as the school “most faithful to Socrates regarding the supreme good,” virtue (97). Indeed Cicero advocates Stoic morals—notably natural law—in a number of his works. Why does he do so? Nicgorski cites Ernest Fortin’s thesis that Cicero appeals to natural law for its political

utility and not for its likely truth, and he tries to refute that thesis by tracing it to another scholar's claim that Stoics did not employ natural law (135n37). But Fortin's thesis is independent of that claim. If Nicgorski's argument stopped there, it would be lacking, because Cicero's accounts of natural law evince traces of his skepticism and concern for political utility (e.g., *On the Laws* 1.18–19, 37). Instead he tries to reconcile Cicero's skepticism with his accounts of natural law by raising the question of how rigid a doctrine of natural law needs to be (107–8 and relevant endnotes). It is a fascinating attempt, and everyone interested in natural law should weigh its merits. It seems to me that he has not fully explained how commands and prohibitions can be issued if not in rigid formulations, and such commands and prohibitions are part of the most famous account of natural law, given by the character Laelius in book 3 of *On the Republic*. Nicgorski comes closest to an explanation with the following statement: "Duties, articulated by the prudent person [especially the statesman] working from the ordinary horizon, are the specific and concrete expressions of the natural law" (108). Thus natural law would not depend on a divine lawgiver. The thesis of Cicero's *On Duties* is that what is honorable or right and what is useful never conflict. Again Nicgorski interprets Cicero as being straightforwardly committed to the thesis—despite evidence to the contrary (*On Duties* 2.58, *Letters to Friends* 4.2.2).¹

Nicgorski offers a valuable treatment of Cicero's political philosophy in *On the Republic* and *On the Laws*. How to understand the relation of those works to the similarly titled works of Plato is a long-standing question. Nicgorski sees Cicero as mostly supportive of Plato's approach to political things; Cicero's main disagreement concerns Plato's lack of attention to statesmanship in his *Republic* and *Laws*. To some scholars, the importance that Cicero assigns to consent in politics brings him closer to modern thinking than to Plato. The Latin for "consent," *consensus*, is probably better translated as "assent" or "agreement" in most cases because "consent" is too suggestive of the modern social contract. Apparently Nicgorski disagrees with that point of translation, but he admirably clarifies the substantive points through careful analyses of (1) Cicero's use of *consensus*, (2) his account of the naturalness of human society, and (3) his view that injustice is more responsible than a lack of consent for the defectiveness of bad regimes.

¹ I have presented this evidence in "How Machiavellian Is Cicero?," in *The Arts of Rule: Essays in Honor of Harvey C. Mansfield*, ed. Sharon R. Krause and Mary Ann McGrail (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 161. See also Douglas Kries, "On the Intention of Cicero's *De Officiis*," *Review of Politics* 65 (Autumn 2003): 375–93. Nicgorski cites both pieces but does not directly respond to the claims.

Nicgorski's final chapter, the most provocative, concerns statesmanship, about which he has already claimed that "consistently throughout Cicero's writings, it is presented as the greatest necessity and the highest human calling" (114). That conclusion follows "from the Socratic practical perspective" of one who "seeks to read the message of nature in the light of commonly evident utilities" (206). Of course, Socrates avoided political leadership. Thus Nicgorski's Cicero blames Socrates for neglecting political responsibility and the art of rhetoric, and Cicero's model statesman must be "a matter of aspiration" rather than an actual person (himself included) (207). As Nicgorski explains the qualities needed in a statesman, he falls into the trap of treating Scipio Aemilianus (in *On the Republic*) and Lucius Licinius Crassus (in *On the Orator*) as Cicero's spokesmen instead of participants in dialogues from which Cicero expects us to learn by questioning every speaker's claims. Nevertheless, Nicgorski gives a sharp analysis of the prudence that statesmanship requires, including the ways in which prudence both leads and depends on the political community. Cicero's ambiguous treatment of glory as the statesman's chief reward becomes clear at the end of this chapter.

As some of my previous remarks have suggested, I find Nicgorski unconvincing on two large issues: the status of contemplation and the relation of philosophy to the political community. On the former point, Nicgorski appears not to be fully consistent. For the most part, Nicgorski's Cicero is so occupied by the "practical perspective" that he treats all intellectual virtue—presumably including contemplation—as a "manifestation of moral virtue" (75–76; cf. 78–79, 232, 242n84, 246). But at one point his Cicero recognizes contemplation as "the most divine of activities," albeit an activity in which our duties do not usually allow us to indulge (116); and at the end of the book, Nicgorski suggests that philosophy "can flower out to a fuller and more detailed moral and political wisdom and even beyond, to a greater understanding of all things" (246). Here he describes philosophy as "a way of life having the object of understanding the nature of things," and the "Socratic turn" to ethics as being meant "to give philosophy a different *primary* object and *initial focus*" (247; italics mine). Can those claims be squared with one another?

On the whole, Nicgorski's Cicero recognizes no essential tension between philosophy and politics (for one exception, see 242n83). He does maintain that the Epicurean rejection of public life is harmful to the city and should not be discussed (23, 121–23). But Nicgorski's Cicero is so much at home with his fellow Romans, so incapable of writing anything other than what he finds to be probably true, that Nicgorski must deny Cicero's explicit claim to be

faithful to Socrates by concealing his opinion in philosophic matters (76–77, citing *Tusculan Disputations* 5.11). Yet in the same work, Cicero insists that philosophy inherently “flees the multitude” because most people are suspicious of it (*Tusculan Disputations* 2.4).

Those reservations aside, Nicgorski makes a convincing case that Cicero does not rank the theoretical way of life over the practical way of life. Neither Cicero’s life nor his philosophical works allow us to associate him with Plato and Aristotle in that respect. For Nicgorski to establish that conclusion in such rich detail—covering the entirety of Cicero’s philosophy, not falling victim to historicism or relativism, not devoting unnecessary effort to tracing Cicero’s sources, displaying an encyclopedic command of secondary material—is a great achievement.

Robert D. Sacks, *The Book of Job: A New Translation with In-Depth Commentary*. Santa Fe, NM: Green Lion, 2016, xv + 311 pp., \$29.95 (paper).

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Few contemporary authors have taught us as much about the quarrel between Jerusalem and Athens as Robert D. Sacks. Sacks's translation and commentary on Genesis first appeared in *Interpretation* over the course of five years, from 1979 to 1984.¹ More than a decade later his translation and commentary on the book of Job was published in *Interpretation*.² These two commentaries, along with Sacks's primer for studying the Bible, titled *Beginning Biblical Hebrew: Intentionality and Grammar*, offer a guide for those who wish to approach the Bible as a coherent work of uniquely profound depth.³ Recently, Sacks revised and published his translation and commentary of the book of Job in a single volume that allows readers to appreciate more fully the significance of his lifelong project.⁴

¹ Robert Sacks, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1990); originally serialized as "The Lion and the Ass: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis," *Interpretation* 8 (1979–80): 29–101; 9 (1980–81): 1–82; 10 (1982): 67–212, 273–317; 11 (1983): 87–128, 249–74, 353–82; 12 (1984): 49–82, 141–92.

² Sacks, *The Book of Job with Commentary: A Translation for Our Time* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1999); originally serialized in *Interpretation* 24 (1996–97): 135–70, 251–86; 25 (1997–98): 3–36, 155–80, 293–330; 26 (1998–99): 21–64.

³ Sacks, *Beginning Biblical Hebrew: Intentionality and Grammar* (Santa Fe, NM: Green Lion, 2008). See my review in *Interpretation* 40, no. 3 (Winter 2014): 411–20.

⁴ Sacks, *The Book of Job: A New Translation with In-Depth Commentary* (Santa Fe, NM: Green Lion, 2016). Parenthetical page references are to this book unless otherwise indicated.

Sacks's project is nothing less than a guide for the perplexed, or rather, for the skeptical contemporary reader who cannot bring himself to take seriously the Bible as an account of man's place in the world. In his discussion of the Hebrew word *melitz* (interpreter), Sacks remarks: "An interpreter's function is to make the thoughts of each person intelligible to the other; thus an interpreter must feel at home under [the horizon of each language], and to that extent he must live beyond either one of them taken singly" (230). Sacks's task as a translator of the Bible is particularly challenging since he is translating for an audience whose members have heard centuries of biblical criticism. Perhaps the most complete criticism was promulgated by Spinoza, whose *Theologico-Political Treatise* systematically attacks scripture's account of prophecy, law, and providence. What makes Spinoza's account particularly compelling is his knowledge of biblical Hebrew, which he uses to establish his thesis that scripture is fundamentally incoherent, written by multiple, superstitious authors and compiled by redactors with various inconsistent political goals. In light of this theological-political situation, and given the enduring force of superstition in human affairs, Spinoza suggests reducing scripture's teaching to an easy-to-grasp moral doctrine of *caritas*.

Thanks in part to its success, Spinoza's critique of scripture inevitably hardened into a dogmatic approach. As Sacks observes, "Too often what was once a living thought in the teacher becomes a hardened dogma for the student—precisely because he cannot reach out to a horizon that is no longer available to him" (194). One such dogma is the belief in progress, and the corresponding view that scholars can understand the text better than the authors themselves. In response, Sacks develops a meticulous method for reading scripture, which conscientiously avoids the assumption of the reader's superiority to the author. He approaches scripture with the presumption that it has something to teach us, even if the message is obscure. His method of translation is imbued with the spirit of modesty and care such that he prefers to admit ignorance rather than force an issue (cf. 123, 126, 155, 189, 285). Near the beginning of his commentary, he concedes: "It would be hard to find many works of which the Italian expression '*traddutore traditore*' (every translator a traitor) is more true than the book of Job. It is obscure both in word and in grammatical form" (103). Similarly, he eschews all speculation about authorship because "it is totally unclear how much one can know about such matters" (104, 205). At most, we can say that the book contains many different voices and perspectives, much like the plays of Shakespeare. Sacks sees little reason to explain this fact as anything other than evidence of the wisdom and talent of the author. Indeed, if he can show that the text

is written with the greatest care, as a possession “set down for all time,” then attempts to dismiss the book as a hasty compilation will be seen as betraying the readers’ ignorance (171, cf. 220).

Biblical criticism, however, is not the only or even the most daunting challenge for a translator of Job. Sacks’s account of Job must compete with the most formidable modern interpretation presented by Thomas Hobbes, whose very title, *Leviathan*, alludes to the central story told by God out of the whirlwind. Hobbes says that he chose the title to remind his readers of Job because his vision of politics is consistent with the biblical view: “Hitherto I have set forth the nature of man, whose pride and other passions have compelled him to submit himself to government, together with the great power of his governor, whom I compared to *Leviathan*. . . where God having set forth the great power of *Leviathan* called him King of the Proud” (*Leviathan*, chap. 28). The key to understanding Hobbes’s analysis of politics is closely connected with his reading of Job.

Sacks’s account of Eliphaz recalls Hobbes’s account of political life. Indeed, the character of Eliphaz raises the possibility that “the world is totally indifferent, if not essentially hostile to human life. Human concerns for justice which remain within the plane of the human cannot be of cosmic concern. It is all no more than a tent which by its outer surface looks much like a solid structure, but which at the mere pull of a pin can crumble out flat” (116). Hobbes fleshes out this account and proposes to strengthen the walls of the city so that they resemble the scales of *Leviathan*, which form “an impenetrable skin” so that the city “cannot be hurt by others” (285). Although human art may at first glance appear to be an imitation of God’s art, Hobbes assures us that in nature “the notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, have there no place” (*Leviathan*, chap. 13). In short, nature—and her creator—have left human beings with no support for their political endeavors. The Hobbesian solution to this dire situation is nothing less than the conquest of nature, which according to Sacks is also laid out in “one of the most beautiful passages of the book” (197).

More broadly, Hobbes’s analysis does seem to conform closely to the meaning of the text. According to Sacks, Job “had grown up with his friends in a comfortable world with its demands and its proscriptions. It all made sense to him, and in the main, things turned out for the best” (138). Job’s suffering comes as a sudden shock, without explanation or sense. To make matters worse, Job was justly renowned for his piety. His punishment appears as a divine judgment on his life, but “why should a man like Job feel the weight

of guilt for a crime which he knows he did not commit?" (205). The tension between justice in the city and cosmic justice appears so sharp that one might reasonably conclude with Hobbes that there is no justice except conventionally, that is, where there is a human law supported by a common power.

One possible response to the Hobbesian interpretation is offered by the interlocutors in the text itself, who claim that the connection between cosmic justice and human justice is too remote for reason to perceive. One character, Zophar, argues that human horizons are too narrow for humans to perceive their place in the whole. Moreover, there are "a myriad of little separate worlds each of which might suddenly come into contact with any other. No world can perceive its effect on any other world till God brings them together—and then it's too late" (144, cf. 199). Of course, such a view suggests that *logos* is of little use in perceiving the true nature of justice, much less in guiding us toward it. Rather, we are thrown back on revelation, or as the character Bildad argues, the political wisdom contained in the tradition (132, cf. 205).

Although Job cannot reconcile his piety and understanding of justice with his punishment, he rejects the arguments of Zophar and Bildad. For one thing, their accounts make light of the very real suffering of innocent human beings like Job (161). Job cannot accept this indifference, bordering on contempt, to political justice. Further, it is not true that the world discloses itself to us only as a chaos that cannot be penetrated by our *logos*. "The world is too orderly, too revelatory, to be a chaos; and yet, chaos is where it always seems to find itself" (147). Hobbes's analysis cannot be easily refuted because it contains some truth, but as Sacks shows, not the whole truth.

Job insists on honoring justice, but without a comprehensive account of the whole he cannot find its grounds, nor can he explain its efficacy in light of the chaos and terror that appear to lie just beyond it (cf. 215). The last human interlocutor, Elihu, attempts to harmonize these clashing elements. He concedes à la Hobbes that the cosmos is indifferent to our fate and does not support the political sphere (238). Political justice requires a prepolitical foundation that is closed to *logos*. In other words, our human horizon, particularly our need to find lasting grounds for justice, points us to God. Elihu means to save us from becoming less than human, but does so at the cost of one of our most essential traits, "the need to see for oneself" (243). It is telling that God's reply "is not a telling but an asking." Rather than devalue *logos*, God's speech from the whirlwind nurtures it.

Still, if political life rests on wisdom embodied in and transmitted through traditions and texts, it appears that those same traditions foreclose the very inquiry which is essential to our humanity. The indomitable spirit of inquiry, especially in the search for justice and wisdom, reminds us not only of Job but, as Sacks reminds us, of Socrates. Indeed, one might argue that Socrates surpasses Job in his efforts to find justice even at the cost of tradition and piety. Though Job too is accused by his friends of impiety, he eventually reconciles with God and recognizes the wisdom of the tradition (195, 205). Socrates, in contrast, defies the tradition and even redefines piety in light of his search for wisdom. By raising the problem of Socrates, Sacks brings us finally to consider the tension between Athens and Jerusalem (150).

As we have already noted, the tension has been obscured by the tendency of modern readers to reject the possibility of revelation and side with secularism. Such a tendency distorts not only our view of Jerusalem, but also of Athens. Sacks's project aims at restoring Jerusalem, but in the process he also brings Athens into sharper relief. By showing that Jerusalem is a worthy, not to say superior, alternative to Athens, Sacks suggests that Jerusalem presents a more comprehensive account of the whole than does Athens. The book of Job presents an astonishing range of opinions about man's place in the whole, and does so in the form of poetry. Not only does it combine philosophy and poetry, but it presents the problem of Socrates as clearly as does Plato. In Sacks's commentary, Job is "the man of inquiry" whose desire to know transcends all earthly bounds such that he demands a hearing before God. As part of that spirit of inquiry, Job presents a critique of tradition itself, which tends to harden into dogma and hostility to reason (194).

In recognition of this critique, the Bible itself makes room for such unique individuals as Job (and Socrates) to challenge the tradition and to see its wisdom for themselves. Sacks points out that the book of Job presents an alternative account to the creation story in Genesis and to man's place in the whole: "The God we meet in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, the artisan God, has within himself the *to be* of the object. He shapes and molds according to his plan, while the more feminine, nurturing God we meet in the book of Job allows for the emergence of the *to be* which is in the thing itself" (253, cf. 266–67). The book of Job reveals another aspect of God, who invites us to observe the whole to appreciate not only our limitations but the proper place for each thing (272–73).

Tilo Schabert, *The Second Birth: On the Political Beginnings of Human Existence*. Translated by Javier Ibáñez-Noé. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015, 200 pp., \$55 (cloth).

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In *The Second Birth: On the Political Beginnings of Existence*, Tilo Schabert formulates the first political question: “Toward what and for what should [a human being] act, and in what way?” (33). It is the great question, he says, and the question that existence asks of every human being. The effort to steer and shape the movement of one’s life in response to this question is a political beginning. For it contains the three essential elements of the political itself: constitution, power, and government. Schabert traces the origin of politics to the first breath of life, drawing from a miscellany of religious, political, and philosophical thinkers including Pascal and Lao Tse, Aristotle and Ibn Khaldûn, Arendt and Anonymous Iamblich, Strauss and Cicero, Voegelin and Heraclitus. He locates the political in an orderly soul, in a crowded train station, and in a society whose structure of power is “nobler” and “more divine” (35). Human beings are political by nature, Schabert contends. Their highest purpose is to govern. In governing, they are bearers and makers of worlds.

The capacity to govern is fundamental to Schabert’s concept of the political. Such a capacity allows human beings to form what is just and beautiful *within* themselves and *without*, in the external world. In Schabert’s theory, there are four *Gestalten*, or given principles, that take hold of human beings with their entrance into the world. These principles define the potential and the limits of human power. They decide the forms that human existence can and *should* have. The four *Gestalten* are divinity, thought, freedom, and law.

The first, divinity, determines one's power to create or destroy, as God in his realm does. Human beings, according to Schabert, have a creative power given them at birth. This power, he says, is evident "in every moment that they think up a project and in every beginning they make toward something" (116). They take what is merely thought and make it actual. Whatever the good or evil they intend, they invent "an intended configuration," "a wished-for consummation," or "a desired connection" (1). They "break and replace the power of bodies" to give society its proper form, or they drain society and damage its inhabitants (3). What human beings do create cannot have the "constancy, duration, stillness [and] unity" of Creation itself, but it can be firm and settled (58). It can persist. To make something persist, says Schabert, is a divine matter. The work of creation itself is the "mimesis of God."

Schabert's second *Gestalt* is thought, which instills the power of a confluence of knowledge and purpose in the mind. He proposes that "power for the recognition of meaning" is a human quality essential to the conduct of life because it comprehends the totality of human existence in the political moment (x). To study "the historical consciousness of human thought," he says, is to realize that the *divine hand* has shaped the rise and fall of civilizations through the ages. The "*Gestalt*-producing" power of God has defined what is and what is possible (12). If the divine potential of human beings is to be realized in the facts of their existence, they must know and understand "what the right life is" (40). Out of the work of cognition, as meaning is woven in thought, a work of power arises in the external world. Following a Platonic line of reasoning, an ordering of society follows the pattern of the ordering of one's soul. Thus, the decision "to be in this or that existential condition" is tied up with civilization itself (4). It has a political import. The individual who organizes himself (herself) in keeping with what is prudent, just, and wise is like a polis. In thought, as human beings find their bearings in a field of "passions, desires, resolutions, fantasies, volitions, yearnings, [and] reasonings," they learn to govern (3). As they become *capable of humanity* and conscious of themselves, their existence opens itself to a capacity for beginnings. The work of the soul points them to the work of laying a foundation for society. For the sake of life and survival, thought becomes a civilizing power. When thought is the subject of prejudice or delusion, it remains "a beginning, nothing more" (7). It must acquire "the character of a reality that founds a reality" to change the world (43).

The third *Gestalt* that Schabert posits is freedom, the principle that unsettles the other *Gestalten* by introducing an element of indeterminacy

into them. Freedom “opens up every form of politics,” and so human beings can choose the form of the political that suits them (117). They are free to turn away from the power they have been given. They are free to deform and destroy. They are free to overstep boundaries. Nevertheless, according to Schabert, they are not free to choose their own nature, whatever their moral inclinations. Human beings are distinct “in time, in space, [and] in the multitude of all other living beings and things,” but they are also inescapably human (7). In modernity, Schabert observes, human beings have sought to transcend their own mortality with intellect and reason. They have taken their divinely given power and transformed it into a pathology. They have tried to “create *their* world for themselves, hence a world totally subordinated to them and created in their image” (47). They have followed their own way, toward a false state of omnipotence that defies “the bonds of the cosmos” (48). Having refused a better way, because they resented a power above themselves, they have lost the highest freedom possible, “a freedom to be themselves” in their humanity (3). They have chosen “a crushing servitude, in which they become willingly dead in spirit” (52). They have become blind and cold.

The fourth *Gestalt* is law, or the principle of “reciprocal agreements freely made by human beings with each other” (52). This *Gestalt* is the only one of the four that human beings give to themselves. Using their pre-given power, those who live and act together put laws in place to bind them to their “togetherness” and protect them from the disquiet of passion and desire (82). Laws, if they are good, says Schabert, serve as “load-bearing elements” (105). They make possible “the order most conducive to the right conduct of life” (102). Within this order, the freedom of the whole finds its proper scope and consequence. Living in accord with the law, which molds their coexistence “to the requirements of coexisting,” human beings are freed for their humanity with others (112). They are freed to do “their own free work” (122). Once created, however, a space for freedom may disintegrate. The structures of government may cease to function for the sake of freedom. For this reason, human beings must care for their freedom. They must look after the power that they place in a governing freedom “exactly as instructed”: giving power and taking it away, choosing good leaders and placing obstructions in their path, beginning good processes and interrupting them, putting good mechanisms in place and confusing their operation. By placing limits on what they have created, human beings keep from losing themselves.

Is a society structured according to these *Gestalten* perfect? No. A perfect society would have no need of them, according to Schabert. What is their

purpose then? To bring to politics a moral end. For Schabert, the care of human beings for themselves and for others is essential to the culmination of a divinely guided life. What distinguishes a good human being from a bad one is his (her) capacity to live a good life in a community. Schabert draws a contrast between love formed in tyranny (Plato's *Gorgias*) and love formed in wisdom, what he calls *eros philosophos* (94). The human being with the first kind of love is "friends neither with other human beings nor with a god, because he cannot live in a community" (95). The one who has the second kind is "the communitarian human being, the creative friend," the just soul who is just to the world (94). In a shared world of bodies, the difference between the two is a political one. Schabert proposes that only other-oriented human beings can "[make] everything and everyone good," as the order of their souls is externalized. These human beings "[operate] among things for the sake of these things, for their permanence, their co-existence and their sociability." They think and act "beyond the circle of their individuality" (35). This is the *second birth* of the individual, a moral awakening into civilization. It is this awakening that gives human beings power over time and death. It gives them hope. A politics "brought to the point of beauty" resists decline and despair (65). And it makes humanity complete. In the "fulfillment of life itself," as Plato, Nietzsche, Rousseau, John Adams, and the scholars of the *Huainanzi* understood, human beings are truly happy (62).

Schabert seeks to counter the failings of modernity with his formulation of the dignity and importance of the political. What is the value of such a formulation? He borrows the concept of a "second birth" from Hannah Arendt, replacing impulse with necessity, and transforming a turn toward others into a moral imperative. Schabert draws on "a wide field of things political" to construct a cosmology tracing the origin of politics to the Divine (127). ("God is a politician," he says [5].) However, he ignores tensions and contradictions in the texts from which he takes his ideas. Schabert posits his theory as a kind of "political science," proven in such texts, as if the mere existence of these ideas were sufficient to prove his claims (127). He uses quotations out of context and interprets them narrowly to fit his arguments. They do not fit neatly into his schema, which plots a post-Enlightenment course between faith and reason. Schabert maintains that his project is "as broadly based and as comprehensive as possible," yet the rules of his *Gestalten* are exact, or "exactly as instructed" (129, 122). The theological side of his thought makes him less a scientist than a prophet. His assumptions raise questions about the legitimacy of his universal logic. What is divine? How is truth known? What is the "proper form" of society (127)? How ought society to attend to the complexities of culture, race,

gender, economy, and education? Schabert does not provide answers to these questions. His theory is given as “a stimulus and a mode of political inspiration” (64). It is precisely in this mode of political inspiration, however, that the value of his formulation lies. His notion of “human creativity directed at the human *polis*” is compelling in this age of terror and doubt (127). It breathes new life into Aristotle’s *poiesis*. It makes a logical space, echoing Wittgenstein, for the power of the individual in a world of bodies. It revives a concern for Strauss’s theological-political predicament. It affords an alternative to the political theology of Carl Schmitt: a theological politics. It challenges the modern polis to find a “better, ‘more beautiful’ way” (45).

Richard F. Hassing, *Cartesian Psychophysics and the Whole Nature of Man*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015, 229 pp., \$90 (cloth).

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From his earliest scientific treatise, it was clear that René Descartes intended to bring mechanical physics to bear on the understanding of human beings and the improvement of human life. The outline of the “nature and scope of knowledge,” in the very early *Rules for the Direction of the Native Intelligence* (Lat. *ingenium*), was only a first attempt to correct that intelligence by means of critical analysis, then to guide us to *bona mens*, a sound mind, and ultimately to human wisdom. Although he modified over time the terms in which he would pursue this task, the aim of improving life by increasing our self-understanding, and, consequently, our choices and actions, remained his goal. Yet that dimension of his thought has been obscured or ignored, in part owing to his intricate style of writing, in part to his untimely death, and in part to a preference for his provocative metaphysics on the part of many readers. Happily, Richard Hassing, attuned to Descartes’s practical intention, has set out to elaborate Descartes’s moral and, by extension, political thought, which is found in his last writing, *The Passions of the Soul*.

Hassing’s study is especially helpful in contrasting throughout Descartes’s alternative to the dominant views of his time, the Aristotelian account and its medieval successors, especially the Thomistic adaptation. Additionally, because Descartes effectively demolished the traditional views of soul and, thus, of the human being, Hassing shows that his work can be linked fruitfully to subsequent developments in moral thought and political anthropology, in which the self rather than the soul and the historicity of human life

predominate. He takes Descartes's work to be pivotal in this change, important for all who are concerned with moral and political philosophy. His own purpose is, then, also practical, insofar as he believes that Descartes thought incisively about religious belief and political fanaticism, and that, in this respect, we can learn from him about dangers that have continued to surface over time and plague us today, which he refers to as "political pathologies."

Hassing's focus is not on Descartes's physics entire, but on his physical principles insofar as they explain the human being, the bodily occurrences that shape life, perception, imagination, thought, and even judgment—"psychophysics." Descartes's scientific approach—he claims to explain the passions "only as a physicist"—delimits the mechanical conditions under which we live and provides a framework for correcting the erroneous opinions that have arisen by habit and been reinforced by misguided thinkers. Since the human being is, after all, not merely a machine, as Descartes admitted from very early on, the framework guides him in distinguishing those parts of human life that are explicable by mechanics from those that are not, and then in describing the "whole nature of man." This includes what Hassing refers to as the arena of "natural and moral-political philosophy."

The book is divided into eleven chapters, a conclusion, and an appendix. The first four chapters set the context, Descartes's earlier, partial accounts of the human being as a mind-body composite: his first attempt to apply new physical principles to the human body in the *Treatise on Man*; the versatility of speech, which defines humans over against animals, in part 5 of the *Discourse on Method*; and the remnant of natural teleology that appears in Meditation 6, the "teaching of nature."

The core of the book recounts and analyzes the main teachings found in the *Passions of the Soul*. Hassing's study of the particulars is careful, detailed, and learned. These qualities support him in addressing three ultimate questions about Descartes's thought: (1) What is the role of physics in the account of the passions? (2) What does Descartes mean by the phrase, "the whole nature of man"? And (3) does the "scientific apparatus" allow Descartes to account for the human being?

To the first question, Hassing answers that physics allows Descartes to provide a new, that is, seventeenth-century, mechanical account of our thoughts incorporated into a doctrine of soul. It replaces the long-standing view that the human mind and its powers are naturally related to external objects; that is to say, the assumption that objects possess the properties and

qualities, such as red or sour or hardness, that we experience them to have. The mechanical account identifies the known properties of bodies (shape, size, and motion) in contrast to what appears to the mind, that is, our various “thoughts,” a term used very widely in Descartes to include everything of which we are aware. It dismisses the notion that the mind is ordered to nature, to “forms,” whether sensible or intelligible, in things. Soul is not the activity of the living, sentient, cognitive being, involved in every aspect of life, but rather is a center of knowledge and experience, with its “principal seat” in the small pineal gland. Motions in this gland trigger associated thoughts in the soul, and from that gland the soul radiates through the body. This arrangement unmask our perceptions, images, and feelings as epiphenomena; outfitted properly with accurate knowledge about them, we can correct our understanding of the world and of ourselves, and can navigate our experiences to good effect by skillful attention to them.

Second, Hassing considers the meaning of the phrase, “the whole nature of man.” He distinguishes three sorts of dualism in Cartesian thought. First is that soul and body are distinct substances, the metaphysical dualism that Descartes famously argues for in the sixth Meditation. Second is “epistemological dualism,” unearthed also in the sixth Meditation. The mind’s ability to act alone and know clearly and distinctly coexists with a kind of “knowing” that is connected to nature through undeniable feelings such as hunger and thirst. To these Hassing adds a third, what he calls “anthropological dualism,” which is properly found in the *Passions of the Soul*. The “whole nature” is a dualism between “our general biological nature,” which serves the good of the body, and “our particular, historical being transcending biology.” The latter is grounded in a sense of oneself that does not seem to derive from mechanical nature or from nature’s teaching, cannot be explained by either, and has value independent of them. Hassing’s discussion of esteem and scorn, along with the other “primitive” passions (*Passions*, art. 149), highlights the locus of those imagined goods that may cause us to compromise or harm bodily life, such as the motives for which we would fight to the death. Descartes’s account is meant to correct misleading motives, with important ramifications for religion and politics. The one thing of highest value, the culminating moment, is found in Descartes’s virtue of generosity, which “makes a man esteem himself as highly as he can legitimately esteem himself” (*Passions*, art. 153). The virtue makes us able to be true masters of our free volitions over against the constant bombardment of external causes. It has itself a double character: that of self-sufficiency and that of resolving always to use volitions well. Hassing then can show Descartes’s remedy for

certain recurring “pathologies” or fanaticisms, especially those involving *thumos*, which can be “redirected from warlike self-assertion and collective self-sacrifice to the defense of one’s own self-sufficient autonomy.”

Finally, in highlighting the limits of Descartes’s achievement, which Hassing has stressed throughout, he marks two of its deficiencies. First, Descartes’s discussion of esteem and scorn, what we perceive as great and small, provides no basis other than his own opinion about what is truly greatest. There is no external standard according to which we can measure it. Second, despite the fact that it has a “certain beauty,” the account of generosity is not clear and distinct, and because it is not, we are free to take it or leave it.

To say this, however, is just to say that there is no scientifically demonstrable or secure basis for evaluative judgments, including moral and political judgments. But that is an old thought, not particular to Descartes. What is particular to Descartes is the attempt to include both the relevant physical causes and undeniable experience, which cannot be explained by those physical causes, in his account of the human being. So it is for Descartes, as it will be for others following, such as Hume and Locke, that what passed heretofore for moral and political thought, the bases of which were also not demonstrably knowable, is accounted for now in terms of “experience” correctly understood and directed by means of a general critique of human nature and knowledge. Even the free will, however undeniably experienced, is not and cannot be clear and distinct. And it will be for Kant to attempt to provide a foundation other than physics or mere personal experience for morality.

Hassing makes no attempt in this volume to relate the three dualities to one another, or to point out where they intersect, though that would be very welcome, especially if the third duality is that of the whole nature of man. In the *Passions of the Soul*, the ego cogito is unmentioned although the knowledge of clear and distinct ideas is implicitly there among the volitions of the soul of the composite. That would seem to relegate clear and distinct knowledge to a departmental function of the human soul. And perhaps it would relegate the ego cogito of Meditations 2 and 6 to a functional construct, a name for one of the ways that mind’s attentive power can self-compartmentalize. Had he lived, Descartes may have moved to tackle the metaphysical issues his teachings in the *Passions* raise. As it is, he seems to have provided, instead, a functional account of the human soul as the only comprehensive one available to us.

Steven B. Smith, *Modernity and Its Discontents: Making and Unmaking the Bourgeois from Machiavelli to Bellow*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016, 416 pp., \$35.52.

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“Modernity is a problem” is the provocative starting point of Smith’s *Modernity and Its Discontents* (ix). Though acknowledging that modernity means many things, Smith’s point of departure is of “modernity as the site of a unique type of human being, one entirely unknown to the ancient and medieval worlds that I want to call the *bourgeois*” (ix). This focus seems to be based on the fact that the bourgeois way of life has been fully identified with America, and “our political regime—the regime dedicated to the pursuit of happiness—is beset with dissatisfaction” (x). The problem of modernity is therefore not only a matter of theoretical reflection but of some political urgency.

Modernity and Its Discontents is divided into four parts, with Part One, “Introduction,” and Part Four, a brief “Conclusion,” bookending the bulk of the book, which consists of a series of essays collected under Part Two, “Modernity,” and Part Three, “Our Discontents.” “Modernity” consists of eight chapters on significant themes in the works of Machiavelli, Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Benjamin Franklin, Kant, and Hegel. These chapters seek to elucidate the development of the idea of progress as “the promise of an unprecedented form of liberation” (xi). This modernity, or indeed “modernities” as Smith notes, resulted in its doppelgänger, or “Counter-Enlightenment” (xii). Part Three, “Our Discontents,” explores this antimodernity with eight chapters on Rousseau, Tocqueville, Flaubert, the “apocalyptic imagination” (Nietzsche, Sorel, Schmitt), Isaiah Berlin, Leo Strauss, Lampedusa, and Saul

Bellow. As each chapter is to some extent self-contained and can be read independently, the book for some will be seen as a collection of elegant and thoughtful essays that engage deeply with a thinker or a theme. The book's two epigraphs seem to anticipate such an approach. As such these essays are a testament to the impressive breadth and erudition of Smith's scholarship that felicitously ranges across politics, philosophy, religion, and literature.

Yet these essays, taken together, are meant to serve a larger purpose, Smith's attempt to understand "modernity" and its "discontents" (the title echoing Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*: xiii). "The thesis that I develop in this book," Smith tells us, "is that modernity has created within itself a rhetoric of anti-modernity that has taken philosophical, literary, and political forms. How did the idea of the bourgeois, once considered virtually synonymous with the free and responsible individual, become associated with a kind of low-minded materialism, moral cowardice, and philistinism? It is this dialectic that I hope to explore" (xi). The great merit of the book is the extent to which the structure Smith adopts, a detailed and wide-ranging engagement with the various theoretical founders of modernity as well as its most telling critics, allows the reader to confront the question of modernity and its discontents. But this structure and approach also limit Smith's own reflections and observations on these major themes to a Preface (ix–xiv), Introduction, "Modernity in Question" (3–26), and a Conclusion, "Modernity and Its Doubles" (347–52). The book therefore is limited in the extent to which we gain an insight into Smith's unmediated and comprehensive insights on the question or problem of modernity. From the brief conclusion, we learn that what is generally considered the crisis of the West is for Smith "the very character of modernity as the site of manifold discontents" (348). These discontents have taken two broad forms. The first is the "political Left" (Kantian, Hegelian, Marxist) that endorses the Enlightenment but seeks better institutions to secure its ends (348). The second is the "Counter-Enlightenment" that has a radical, apocalyptic form that wants to overthrow it (de Maistre, Nietzsche, Sorel, Heidegger), a postmodernism that is in certain respects the "Enlightenment on steroids" (349), and a moderate form that seeks to sustain and correct it (Tocqueville, Berlin, and Strauss, as well as Oakeshott and Aron). Smith favors the Counter-Enlightenment in its moderate form, noting that the real problem lies in "progressivism" as a kind of "ersatz religious faith" and its origins in modern science and positivism (Descartes, Bacon, Hobbes) (350). It is the scepticism regarding progressivism, according to Smith, that has posed questions about the Enlightenment. Living with the competing strands of the Enlightenment and its counter "has

made the emancipatory power of reason and science increasingly illusory.” Yet Smith’s concluding words seem to discern benefits to this “double” aspect of modernity: “We remain perpetually gnawed at by our manifold discontents—and that is a good thing” (352).

To see the theoretical bases for these concluding observations we need to turn to the beginning of the book. Yet the brevity of treatment in the Preface and the Introduction means Smith’s stimulating insights into the character of modernity remain ambiguous or insufficiently explored. Consider, for example, two major questions prompted by the title of the book: What does Smith understand by modernity? What are its discontents?

Smith is aware of the complex nature of “modernity,” which “came to be associated with the sovereign individual as the unique locus of moral responsibility, the separation of state and civil society as distinct realms of authority, the secularization of society or at least the lessening of the public role of religion, the elevation of science and scientific forms of rationality as the standard for knowledge, and a political regime based on the recognition of rights as the sole basis of its legitimacy” (ix). Later, he observes, “Modernity considered here is hardly all of a piece. It might be more accurate to speak of modernities. It includes everything from liberal modernity that values tolerance, commerce, self-discovery to more ambitious plans for large scale social engineering, achieving of rationalist perfectionism, and the transformation of the nation-state into a world of federation or even a world state” (xi). In the introductory chapter he goes on to outline the various ways modernity has been understood, from scientific and philosophical innovations, wars of religion, and revolutions that entrenched equality and rights of man to artistic changes (4). This capacious or comprehensive definition of modernity, which he frequently also calls “Enlightenment,” is understandable given the breadth of thinkers examined and ideas explored in the book. At the same time, Smith seems unwilling to leave modernity and the Enlightenment at this level of generality. “Is the idea of modernity a coherent one?” (5) is the compelling question he poses. Yet the answer he provides proves to be ambiguous. For example, Smith makes a persuasive case that an important aspect of modernity is the idea of a “permanent revolution” or the idea of “progress” or “progressivism” (6–11). At the same time, however, he argues that modernity is above all characterized by the bourgeois, a new type of human being and a form of civilization that is criticized by the “Counter-Enlightenment” for its focus on science and commerce at the expense of culture (15–17). What is at the heart of modernity therefore remains elusive. Is there a constitutive core

to modernity that shapes and defines its peripheral aspects? Or is modernity constituted by modernities, related but distinct elements or strands that mostly reinforce but sometimes counter each other?

These questions are especially important for understanding Smith's diagnosis of modernity's "discontents" and more specifically his thesis, borrowing from Horkheimer and Adorno, that there is a "dialectic of Enlightenment" where "the critical spirit that had once been turned against the past would be turned against modernity itself, creating its own dissatisfaction with the present" (13). Because every thesis has its antithesis, "every Enlightenment produces its Counter-Enlightenment" (14). The Counter-Enlightenment did not seek to restore a world, "but to create a more accelerated form of the new" (14). Why the dialectic of the Enlightenment is not sublated, but instead accelerates and therefore exacerbates modernity, remains unclear in this account. Indeed, this insight into modernity seems to contend with Smith's other view of modernity as constituted by its "double" (20–23). Here he argues that the Enlightenment and its Counter-Enlightenment "are not so much antagonists as copartners in the modern project" (20). This view is presumably intended to explain the different strands in modernity, distinguishing between the nihilistic and bourgeois self-hating Counter-Enlightenment that embraces fascism and reactionary modernism from those strands informed above all by Tocqueville (and Strauss) which initiate a conversation with modernity to defend it (21–22). Yet on what basis one should choose one over the other remains unclear. What is evident, however, is that *Modernity and Its Discontents* is in the spirit of Tocqueville, seeking to discern important and fruitful areas of continuity and discontinuity between modernity and its doubles through engagement and conversation (23). In this task and ambition it succeeds admirably.

John von Heyking, *The Form of Politics: Aristotle and Plato on Friendship*.
 Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016, 233 pp., \$32.95.

Love with Wings

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Partly a work of exegetical scholarship and partly a work of philosophical reflection, *The Form of Politics* is an insightful treatise emerging from wonder over what Aristotle calls *sunaisthesis*, the joint perception of the good between persons. It is this sunaesthetic moment between persons that forges the most complete form of friendship, virtue friendship, which in turn shapes politics. The puzzle for exegetical scholarship, and philosophical reflection, is exactly how virtue friendship is supposed to relate to politics. Aristotle says that friendship resides in political communities, communities that come together for the sake of what is just and advantageous (*EN* 1159b25–1160a30). Yet political friendship or civic friendship is not the same as virtue friendship, although it involves virtue friendship (*Politics* 1261a10–1262a25). Focusing on the nature of the common good helps make political friendship clearer. In a political community, I share and pursue the good of others at the same time as I pursue my own good. For example, a farmer who joins a militia to defend his land may still be assigned to protect his own land, but he acts as part of a plan that aims to protect everyone's farms.¹ All those who share in this plan exhibit the "like-mindedness" (*homonoia*) that comes with friendship.

¹ Michael Pakaluk, *Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics": An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 271–72.

John von Heyking points out that this does not solve the puzzle. Accounts of the common good state *that* it involves like-mindedness and friendship, but they do not state *what* the common good looks like. It is therefore not clear *what* political friendship is. For von Heyking, the question to ask is: what is the version of sunaesthetic friendship, in politics, which would constitute political friendship?

The standard answer to this question emphasizes that the characteristic activity of political friendship is deliberation over what is just and advantageous to the community as a whole. Von Heyking argues that as deliberation presupposes agreement about the ends, one should be asking what activity the agreement about the ends presupposes. His answer is *festivity*: “the political or civic version of sunaesthetic friendship, and the clearest expression of the common good” (38). Festivity shows the essential unity of the regime, and provides the form and standard of political friendship.

By elevating the practice of festivity to the form of politics, above reasoned deliberation about the just and advantageous, von Heyking offers a kind of peace settlement to the quarrel between poetry and philosophy. From the point of view of Plato and Aristotle, that is to say, philosophy, von Heyking defends these verses from the start of *Odyssey* IX—verses that praise festivity and poetry:

There’s nothing better
 Than when deep joy holds sway throughout the realm
 And banqueters up and down the palace sit in ranks,
 Enthralled to hear the bard, and before them all, the tables
 Heaped with bread and meats, and drawing wine from a mixing-bowl
 The steward makes his rounds and keeps the winecups flowing.
 This, to my mind, is the best that life can offer. (13)

Von Heyking hopes to provide poetry’s defense “without meter” (*Republic* 607d), softening Socrates’s harsh moral judgment of poetry in Plato’s *Republic*.

Von Heyking’s defense “without meter” starts with Aristotle, by connecting *Politics* VII and VIII, Aristotle’s discussion of the good regime, to the *Poetics*. For von Heyking, Aristotle’s *Poetics* endorses festivity and poetry as beneficial to political and human life, assisting in the completion of political and virtue friendship. Poetry blends generality and specificity, teaching practical wisdom through *mimesis*: particular representations that communicate universals. Von Heyking develops a theme in line with other neo-Aristotelians (notably Alasdair MacIntyre) that humans are essentially story-telling animals. In moments of *sunaisthesis*, our stories are transformed by the

stories of our friends. Friends become part of the story of our own life. We then carry this shared storytelling into political life, where it brings unity and collective civic action, shaping the good regime. Yet Aristotle never dissolves the individual character of the person into collective action: *sunaisthesis* after all is about a shared perception between persons, which leads us to love the individual character (*ethos*) of the other person. Von Heyking sees here the limits of philosophy, for the otherness of the other person, his unique character, eludes the grasp of reason.

For von Heyking, the Platonic dialogues are better suited to this problem (87), so the second half of his book examines *Lysis* and the *Laws*. These dialogues provide an image of the practice of *sunaisthesis*. Von Heyking argues that the image of friendship in *Lysis* refutes the well-known charge of Gregory Vlastos that Plato's view of love is about loving a metaphysical universal, not the uniqueness of an individual. Plato, von Heyking argues, presents an image of the practice of *sunaisthesis* that honors individuality through the *daimonic* symbolism of Hermes. Hermes is the spiritual force that creates human friendships, by opening human beings up to the gift of otherness. Praised throughout Greek festivals, poetry, and hymns for this capacity, Hermes reminds that a friend cannot be subsumed under a metaphysical universal of friendship, but that a friend is a mysterious image of the divine, a revelation that the divine interacts with human beings.

The *Laws* develops this theme in a political setting, where music, myths, choruses, dances, and "preludes" (see *Laws* 722d–e) create the like-mindedness among the hypothetical citizens of Magnesia. Moreover, the dramatic action draws attention to how the characters of the dialogue draw together in friendship. Eventually they grasp an insight of a *daimonic* quality: that the divine plays a role in human life.

There is undoubtedly a liturgical quality to von Heyking's understanding of festivity; the Thomist Josef Pieper influences his understanding of festivity (13). Von Heyking's understanding of civic celebrations discloses a transcendent, quasi-religious practice. Not wishing to make them the same as religious practice, von Heyking tells us that Christian liturgical services are "not political" (194). Regrettably, he never elaborates on what the difference between the Magnesian civic religion and the Christian civic religion would be. Von Heyking thinks that the festivity akin to the Magnesian regime can exist in modern times, but a more radical thesis would be that Christianity

changes the classical scope of politics, so that the project of civic unity is necessarily and explicitly incomplete, until modernity resets it.²

As the practice of friendship transcends our capacity to understand it theoretically (128), it is fitting for von Heyking to conclude his book with an account of the practice of festivity that shows what the common good looks like. Von Heyking selects the Calgary Stampede, an annual summer festival that takes place in the city of Calgary, Alberta. The Stampede, a festival blending rodeo, agricultural exhibition, and midway, gives the city of Calgary great renown throughout North America, so that Calgary's fame easily surpasses the similar-sized provincial capital of Alberta, Edmonton.

Von Heyking describes the Stampede because he thinks it highlights the goods of tolerance and civic friendship. This raises the issue of whether von Heyking's defense of poetry "without meter" actually succeeds in softening philosophy's harsh moral judgment of poetry exhibited in Plato's *Republic*. For von Heyking does not think all political festivals are praiseworthy; he rejects the festivals of the French Revolution and Nuremburg rallies because they lack justice (194–95).

The Stampede also lacks justice. To put it mildly, no participant in the Calgary Stampede would ever mistake it for a temperance movement, and it takes no wild act of the imagination to consider how intemperate acts threaten justice. Von Heyking concedes that there are aspects of the festival that nourish injustice (202); yet he defends the festival on account of other just and advantageous aspects, such as multicultural tolerance. For example, it fosters participation from a variety of cultures that never experienced rodeos, such as immigrant Muslims. They wear cowboy hats over their hijabs (203), and the city of Calgary sets up prayer tents so they can still participate in the festival during Ramadan (201). By assessing the festival so plainly in terms of what is just and advantageous, it is clear von Heyking considers the merits of the Stampede from the moral judgment seat of philosophy. He reasons about the festival's merits as a spectator, placing himself and his readers at a critical distance from the festival. This critical distance is not unlike that of an Edmontonian who, one summer, asks his friends if it is worth descending from Edmonton to Calgary in order to see the festival. How would this Edmontonian reason about it?

² See Pierre Manent, *Metamorphoses of the City: On the Western Dynamic*, trans. Marc Lepain (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 4–9.

An enlightened Edmontonian might think that the best life is pursued by a decision not to participate in the festival, and instead to converse about the problem of what justice is in the company of friends. This Edmontonian sees the festival as incomplete in terms of the best life. He grants that in attending the festival he could share in some just activities and lead a good life, but he recognizes its defects. So it is by discussing justice with friends that one takes seriously the *problem* of living a good life.³ This discussion draws the Edmontonian to the best life. From this perspective, the good regime should be praised not for allowing its citizens the leisure to participate in festivals, but because its promotion of leisure encourages its citizens to pursue the nightly conversations conducive to the best life.

This path of reasoning is emboldened by von Heyking's portrayal of the festival in terms of what is just and advantageous. He judges the festival from the perspective of philosophy, so he must be prepared to meet a challenge from the perspective of philosophy as to the ultimate worth of the festival. However, von Heyking's portrayal of the festival has the character of setting up a screen around the city. When he removes the screen it is to hint at divine transcendence, not philosophy.⁴ He does not tell us how festivity takes us to philosophy, for festivity cannot be the best life. However he would attend to that notable gap in his book, von Heyking would likely argue that the philosophic path presupposes an understanding of what the festival is. The Edmontonian may be doubtful of all the advantages of the Calgary Stampede, but he at least takes the festival seriously. His counterpart is the smug and cynical Laurentinian who would not be caught within five hundred miles of the Calgary Stampede, and so fails to understand political life.

Von Heyking's philosophical goal is to draw from the ancients to teach his reader a way to think about friendship and politics in modernity that does not descend into smugness and cynicism. Von Heyking offers a rich meditation on friendship's role throughout life past and present, with reference to a variety of political and literary figures. Winston Churchill, Abraham Lincoln, Gail Caldwell, Geddy Lee, Thomas Mann, and C. S. Lewis all feature. Von Heyking's treatment of the friendships of the duke of Marlborough

³ Stephen Salkever, "Taking Friendship Seriously," in *Friendship and Politics: Essays in Political Thought*, ed. John von Heyking and Richard Avramenko (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 64.

⁴ See Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 28.

is a magnificent demonstration of why Leo Strauss urged Churchill's *Life of Marlborough* to be "required reading for every political scientist."⁵

Ultimately, Von Heyking's quarrel between the ancients and the moderns is not a matter of reason, but a matter of love. The Romantic Movement's exaltation of bodily erotic love, captured in Lord Byron's assertion that friendship is love without wings, is his real modern adversary. Von Heyking is surely right that we now see friendship as "diluted eros" (93)—only consider one of the latest neologisms, "bromance," to spot the extent of the decay. It would do us well to reflect on how *sunaisthesis* evinces wonder, deepening our own moral lives and our own political regime. Von Heyking is well aware of Tocqueville's critique of democracy (128–30); standing against Byron with Aristotle and Plato would go some way toward combating democracy's corrosion of the spirit of association that exacerbates the drift toward loneliness. Only friendship, rightly understood, can save us now. *The Form of Politics* is well summarized by an epithet Evelyn Waugh attached to a man who never made an enemy nor lost a friend: "Oh dear friendship, what a gift of God it is. Speak no ill of it."⁶

⁵ Leo Strauss, "Churchill's Greatness," *Weekly Standard*, Jan. 4, 2000, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/churchills-greatness/article/11653>.

⁶ Evelyn Waugh, *The Life of Right Reverend Ronald Knox* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 115. The author of the epithet is Fr. Bede Jarrett, OP.

Robert C. Bartlett, *Sophistry and Political Philosophy: Protagoras' Challenge to Socrates*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016, 224 pp., \$40 (cloth).

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Robert C. Bartlett's *Sophistry and Political Philosophy: Protagoras' Challenge to Socrates* is a singular achievement. It combines meticulous textual analysis, deep scholarship, and unflagging attention to the most serious questions with writing that is both lively and lucid. Bartlett expertly guides the reader through the twists and turns of Plato's *Protagoras* and *Theaetetus* in order to clarify the debate between sophistry and Socratic political philosophy. He argues persuasively that this debate remains alive and vital; contemporary relativism, the view that reason lacks any solid foundation, is the legacy of the sophistry that was born in ancient Greece, and the truth of its claims would render philosophy an exercise in futility (3, 164, 173). Nothing less than the very possibility of education in the full sense of the word, the possibility of learning something true about moral and political questions, or even about anything at all, is at stake.

Bartlett tackles the *Protagoras* and the *Theaetetus* because Protagoras, the greatest sophist of antiquity, is a central figure in both dialogues. Socrates examines his moral/political doctrine in the former, and his theoretical doctrine in the latter. This short review cannot do justice to Bartlett's many excellent observations and compelling interpretations, including his instructive discussions of other dialogues and authors (e.g., 88–89, 124–26), trenchant observations about contemporary questions (e.g., 185), and vivid accounts of Socrates's own masterful rhetoric, subtlety, and humor (e.g., 30, 42, 71, 86–87, 97). It will aim instead to outline the book's seminal contribution: bringing

into sharp relief the character of sophistry and thereby of Socratic political philosophy. In examining these dialogues, Bartlett uncovers the opinions at the heart of sophistry and thereby lays the foundation for understanding the distinctiveness and even the superiority of Socratic political philosophy.

Bartlett argues that Socrates's examination of Protagoras in the *Protagoras* has two distinct objectives (72, 89, 213–14). Socrates questions Protagoras initially for the sake of his young companion Hippocrates, who wishes to see and perhaps study with Protagoras, but also for his own purposes. Through an analysis of Protagoras's famous long speech and Socrates's subsequent cross-examination of Protagoras, Bartlett first shows how Socrates exposes Protagoras's defective prudence. Socrates does so by bringing out what Protagoras claims to teach his students, namely, that while belief in the gods and the political virtue they demand is good for political communities, those beliefs are neither true nor is there any need to practice the civic virtues if one can cleverly disguise one's failure to do so (38–39, 97–98). Noting some evident similarities between Protagoras and Socrates (115–16, 126), Bartlett reveals the deeper difference: Protagoras's casual disdain for political virtue (208–9). But that disdain has practical consequences for Protagoras. As Bartlett deftly shows, Protagoras's open dismissal of civic virtue leaves him vulnerable to Socrates's manipulation of Protagoras's argument so that it openly contends that piety is unjust (46) and that committing injustice is moderate (49). Bartlett thus shows how easily Socrates undermines Protagoras's claim to possess (and thereby to be able to teach) the art of speaking cleverly with a view to one's own safety (210–11) and that Protagoras's vulnerability arises from his failure to treat questions of ordinary piety and justice with any seriousness (103).

Socrates next turns from investigating Protagoras's teaching to examining the man himself. Here Bartlett brings out the defective understanding that underlies Protagoras's contempt for political virtue, linking it to what is revealed to be Protagoras's confusion about courage (74). Protagoras's initial account of courage appears to be compatible with his view, stated earlier, that the only sensible guiding principle is what is good or advantageous for oneself (81, 97). But after an interlude in which Socrates teases out Protagoras's hedonism (82, 88), Protagoras is no longer willing to concede the implication of his initial argument about courage: in facing terrible things, the courageous do only what is most pleasant. Protagoras, then, is not only imprudent; he does not know his own mind (99, 103–4). His evident admiration for courage conflicts with his view that the good is the pleasant. He cannot treat courage

as merely the pursuit of the pleasant and thus refuses to reduce courage to the end that he has openly argued is the only sensible end for human beings (97–98, 104). As much as Protagoras thinks one’s own good, or one’s own pleasure, is the only sensible standard, when the implication of this claim becomes clear to him, “he recoils from it” (105). Bartlett argues that Protagoras remains attached to something like noble courage and the hopes that accompany its exercise at least in part because of the character of the world as Protagoras describes it in his initial long speech (38–39). After all, the knowledge described in that speech is limited in what it can provide human beings, leaving open the hope that noble courage is somehow rewarded, perhaps even by divine beings (65, 105). Protagoras’s contempt for civic virtue, one of whose manifestations is the display of noble courage, has prevented him, Bartlett shows, from seeing the hold it continues to have over him and thereby the power of its claim to explain the soul (cf. 222).

The Protagoras of the *Theaetetus*, conjured up by Socrates, is a somewhat different Protagoras (119, 231n10). We encounter here, says Bartlett, “a much more impressive thinker” with a radical theoretical doctrine that Socrates insists on laying out. Socrates, in conversation with Theaetetus, a young, promising mathematician, introduces the late Protagoras’s famous claim that “man is the measure” to flesh out Theaetetus’s own tentative definition of knowledge as “nothing other than” perception. While the ostensible subject of the dialogue is “What is knowledge?” Bartlett shows that the deeper issue at stake is whether knowledge is possible (122). Bartlett’s discussion carefully distinguishes among the various accounts of knowledge that Socrates brings forth—that knowledge is perception, that man is the measure, and that all is in motion or flux—and he shows the ways in which they are positions that do not necessarily imply or depend on one another (135–36, 143). Bartlett pays special attention to the difficulties attending the thesis that all is in motion and what it means to hypothesize that there is no stable or knowable being but that whatever “is” is in constant motion and thus is never actually an “is” (153–54, 173). Among its many difficulties, the thesis about motion is necessarily hypothetical (143, 151) and at odds with our experience of the world (205–6). Yet, as Bartlett shows, the motion thesis is essential to understanding the radicalized version of Protagoras’s claim that man is the measure: it is precisely because he accepts that all is in motion that Protagoras can maintain that *each* man is the measure. Hence the Protagoras of the *Theaetetus* embraces a full-blown relativism, meaning that all things, including and especially morality, piety, and even the good, have no stability or truth beyond one’s private and momentary experience of them (176–77). Bartlett’s

careful analysis of the implications of this thesis leads him to raise this pressing question: why would Protagoras hold a doctrine that, at least in Socrates's account of it, leads him to the position where one can ultimately say nothing about knowledge at all (202–3)? For the full elaboration of Protagoras's theoretical doctrine suggests that knowledge, understood as the human capacity to grasp anything truly, is impossible.

Bartlett argues that Protagoras's position is rooted in an awareness of the mysteriousness at the heart of any attempt to explain how or why the world appears to us as it does (154, 170–71, 220), and the challenge that this poses to assessing or addressing the claims of those, including prophets, who claim to speak with gods (162–63, 202–3). By embracing the argument that everything is subjective, Protagoras relieves himself of the burden of demonstrating the falsity of the claim that there exists a “knowledge” that is beyond the experiences of others (162–64). If there is no way to access the experiences of another, much less to assess their truth, Protagoras's doctrine at least allows that if they cannot be refuted, they also cannot be confirmed (203). The extremity of Protagoras's doctrine, especially what Bartlett argues is his willingness to treat the good as relative (171, 197–98, 202), thus appears to be a response to a *theoretical* problem. The difficulty is that in trying to respond to an argument the truth of which Protagoras is unable to refute, Protagoras gives up on knowledge altogether, a position, Bartlett notes, whose “truth” undermines Socrates's very way of life and thus explains why Socrates treats it with the utmost seriousness (173, 224).

What, then, is the connection between Protagoras's radicalism that Socrates lays out in the *Theaetetus* and his moral/political confusion that Socrates exposes in the *Protagoras*? Bartlett shows how in the latter dialogue Socrates outshines and out-argues Protagoras, largely because his interlocutor fails to take virtues such as piety and justice seriously, thereby failing to recognize and understand the full panoply of human concerns, including love and mortality (214–15). The most compelling evidence of this failure is Protagoras's confusion over courage and especially his own apparent attraction to its noble and beautiful examples. But the Protagoras of the *Theaetetus*, whose doctrine is rooted in an awareness of the impossibility of refuting all possible claims, would not seem to be as disturbed as he turns out to be in the *Protagoras* when Socrates exposes the confusion in his arguments (96, 99). Bartlett acknowledges this tension between the dialogues and argues that in the *Theaetetus*, Plato improves upon the historical Protagoras, at least in part to explain Socrates's *own* concerns (222; cf. 191). By bringing out the

theoretical roots of Protagoras's doctrine in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates points to his profound concern with the challenge that this doctrine poses to his way of life and to his *own* grounds for addressing that challenge. For, as Bartlett shows, Socrates adumbrates a tantalizing alternative: he somehow discovered a stable enough human perspective to maintain consistently that there is a knowledge available that directs human beings to the truly good things (195–97, 217–18, 223). Indeed, throughout the discussion of the *Theaetetus*, Bartlett alerts his readers to textual indications of an account of knowledge that is rooted in perception, making man qua man a measure, without needing to resort to the argument that all is flux (161, 221–22). Bartlett guides his reader towards this possibility by exploring the results of Socrates's peculiar practice of dialectics, which requires, among other things, taking seriously ordinary opinions about the virtues rather than assuming their conventionalism, being keenly alive to the profound human concern for love and beauty, and possessing in his own soul a remarkable degree of toughness or steadiness that allows him to pursue these questions wherever they lead (89, 105, 215–17). This guidance, at least for this reviewer, is the most instructive part of a deeply rewarding book.

Hillel Halkin, *After One Hundred and Twenty: Reflecting on Death, Mourning, and the Afterlife in the Jewish Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016, 232 pp. \$27.95 (cloth).

The Longing That Dares Not Speak Its Name

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Near the end of his remarkably wide-ranging, humane, and beautifully written book, Hillel Halkin turns away from the complex and variegated traditional Jewish view of death, mourning, and the afterlife to the views of all but the most Orthodox of contemporary Jews. In a word: not my concern. Despite having access to perhaps the most thoroughly worked-out understanding of the afterlife, most especially in its relation to our moral worth as earned in this world, Halkin's thoughtful and extremely representative contemporary Jews show no interest in this "ray of hope" (207). The afterlife, they tell him, plays "no role in [their] religion" (202). The whole question of eternity and its relation to our mortality, that is, "didn't much matter to anyone" Halkin interviewed. Without evincing the slightest grandstanding or morbidity or thoughtless deference to what his tradition has told him, however, Halkin suggests it *does* matter to him—and, I suspect, will to many of his readers. The unstated question that, to no small extent, lies at the bottom of his book, then, is this: Have contemporary, enlightened Jews simply shed a primitive belief that they have outgrown (like a butterfly emerging from its pupa) or have they somehow been distracted from confronting death and its full meaning?

The stated intention of Halkin's book is to examine the evolution of the Jewish view of death, from its biblical origins as something that is "for all intents and purposes final" to the various (sometimes tension-laden) aspects of death's "superstructure," namely, the afterlife—or various kinds of possible afterlives—that Jews and non-Jews might hope or fear to experience (202). (Halkin does not abide by the Orthodox view that every aspect of the afterlife discovered in postbiblical, chiefly Talmudic, sources was present in the form of "hints" and implications of the original biblical text. As do so many others, he places a great burden on the fact that there is no explicit mention of an afterlife in the Bible until the book of Daniel.) Rather than simply recount, more or less chronologically, the additions and accretions (and even revisions) to the initial biblical account—which he indeed does, in wide-ranging, careful, and generally sympathetic fashion—Halkin makes an effort to sprinkle throughout his story an *interpretation* of the Talmudic, Mishnaic, and other accounts of various features of the afterlife. He is particularly sensitive to the human needs—primordial, psychological, and particularly moral—that can be met (and indeed seem to be met only) in the fully developed traditional Jewish view of the afterlife.

In his brief canvassing of several ancient (non-Jewish) accounts of death and the afterlife, Halkin suggests that a belief in the afterlife was more or less universal—implicitly rejecting Nietzsche's claim that "priests" of various stripes concocted and imposed on humanity the notion of the afterlife (or the "after-worldly"). In its infancy, the afterlife was routinely understood as a somewhat mysterious but rather "grim" place (11). (Indeed: despite glancing at Homer's depiction of Hades in the *Odyssey*, Halkin fails to report Achilles's fierce condemnation of that afterlife, filled as it is with "senseless" shades—which, had he known then what he knows now, would certainly have made him cling to life under even the most unvirtuous and demeaning circumstances.) Halkin focuses here on the most primitive Jewish concept of the afterlife, She'ol. It seems like nothing so much as the "dreamless sleep" that Socrates conjures in Plato's *Apology*. For, as Halkin comments, She'ol was "not a place of reward and punishment; all its inhabitants are treated equally" (15). Or rather, it was a place of punishment simply, death itself being the original punishment (for Adam and Eve's sin in Eden: 16).

The failure of death thus understood to discriminate between good and evil individuals proved intolerable. Halkin seems to present morality itself as the first innovation that had to be created in the face of death: so menacing was the thought of a simple expiration of life, humans could not but wish for

some form of extension of life. And, given its character as manifestly contravening the somber necessity of death's apparent finality, the afterlife would have to be seen as something *deserved*, something to be earned somehow. The manner of earning it, of course, proved to be morality, understood as fulfilling God's will in light of the fact that "all His ways are just" (161, quoting Deut. 32:4).

Halkin is at his most fascinating in sketching the evolution of the meaning of the afterlife as a consequence of our morality. For there is a grave problem connected with the notion of rewarding morality. If an act is undertaken for a (personal) reward—and not for its own sake or, more particularly, for the sake of God—then it is hard to see how it can still be considered a moral act. Any action undertaken to secure for myself a portion in the world to come can be considered only an ante of sorts, a price to be paid for a much-desired outcome. Judaism's initial response is to dissociate my reward from me personally. As Halkin notes, while the demand that the Commandments be observed is placed on every Jewish individual (the singular "you" being employed throughout the relevant places in Deuteronomy), the "consequences" or "benefits" will be enjoyed only "in the aggregate" (Deuteronomy shifting to the plural "you" for those) (25). I behave morally, that is, so that my progeny—be it my flesh and blood or the Jewish people altogether—may prosper.

The purity of such self-sacrifice, however, proved an insufficient compensation: "it wasn't enough" (26). (It may not even have been quite so pure: the continuation of my people is the essential ground for *me* being remembered.) As the "old homogeneous, cohesive Israelite society" gave way to the new, more urban, more dispersed, and more anonymous "Jewish" one, it became harder and harder to envision, with any degree of certainty, that one "would have anything in common with [one's] own progeny" (28). That posthumous reward for my good deeds having been rendered uncertain, I would now have to seek their effects "in the course of my own life" (29). The afterlife, then, seemed to require additional elaboration as individualism—a concern with one's "own separate fate"—emerged (56). And yet, as Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) points out—paraphrasing loosely—bad things happen to good people no less than to bad. In words almost identical to those used by Achilles when justifying his temporary withdrawal from the Trojan War, Solomon notes "one end awaits them all" (Eccles. 3:16–19; cf. *Iliad* 9.318–19). Halkin identifies three possible ways forward: reincarnation (the belief held by the atypical Philo), bodily resurrection in this world, or an afterlife in which one receives "his just deserts" (31–33).

Though all three play a role in classical Judaism, Halkin focuses chiefly on the ways in which the dominant alternative—the afterlife—was conceived (the last group to have been “afterlife skeptics” seem to have been the Sadducees who, Halkin observes, “could afford to be” insofar as they were wealthy and powerful and hence unique in their capacity to enjoy this world: 41). What effect did the afterlife have on this life? Unlike certain “mystical” religions, Judaism did not preach bodily abstinence. Rather, the soul’s task was to elevate—to sanctify—the body (whose sole task often seemed to be to drag the soul down). As a result, there was a sustained dispute over whether the righteous would enjoy the afterlife in some kind of embodied state.

Those who argued that the soul retained a body in the world to come were confronted with a series of practical questions, such as “which of the many ages that I have been in this world will I be in the next one?” (61). On the other hand, if the soul continues to exist without the body, how will it feel or perceive (62)? Halkin turns to Rav’s contemporary Plotinus to illustrate the Neoplatonist view—rejected by Rav—of the afterlife. (Neoplatonism, for our purposes, consists of treating various Socratic hypotheses about the afterlife presented in the *Phaedo* as though they were asserted truths.) Under this assumption, the afterlife consists of “pure intellection” (64). But Rav (the chief compiler of the Talmud) rejects both the projection of embodied souls into the afterlife and the “philosophical” alternative of pure intellection. The souls in paradise, according to the final Talmudic position, simply bathe in God’s light.

Halkin here notes the fundamental connection between morality and theology: souls admitted to paradise have “earned their place there by living virtuously” (66). Here too a question arises. For if this is so, why should there be a hell? Would not exclusion from paradise itself constitute a “natural” punishment? To make sense of this, Halkin turns to the Talmudic Tractate Rosh Hashanah. Not only does this tractate contain the most extensive treatment of hell in rabbinic literature, it may (in its connection to the holiday of Rosh Hashanah) unlock the mystery of its function or purpose (70). On that Day of Judgment, Jews are to consider the three relevant classes of people: the wholly righteous, the wholly sinful, and the “intermediate.” While the wholly sinful (including apostates and skeptics) descend to Gehenna (hell) and remain there forever, the intermediate face one of three fates: go there, quake for a year, then ascend (to paradise); go there and, after their bodies disappear (in twelve months), their souls are “burned” and scattered (71); or, as the merciful Hillel suggests, those whose good deeds balance their evil

ones will be spared Gehenna altogether, while only those whose good deeds are outweighed by their evil ones descend and have their souls scattered. That is, while a ray of hope is held out to those who led “intermediate” lives on earth, the truly sinful will be punished eternally (though not, apparently, on the Sabbath: 76). Halkin might have pressed his original question here: does not the insistence that some punishment exists beyond the mere failure to enjoy a portion of the world to come reflect a certain *doubt* on the part of the rabbis that bathing in God’s divine light for eternity is all that need be hoped for? Does it not imply a suspicion that the wicked *got away* with something here? And does not the relative quiet of the whole discussion of hell indicate a certain embarrassment at the moral confusion its very existence might thus seem to entail?

In perhaps the most important section of the book, Halkin contrasts the philosophic and the antiphilosophic attitudes that have manifested themselves in Judaism. He first considers Maimonides’s “more radical approach,” which rejects “personal immortality” for all but perhaps those who have attained “knowledge” (94–96). This brief but penetrating discussion contains the only misreading of a source that I noted in the work. Despite noting that Maimonides argues “When the intellect comprehends a thing, [it is] *not* a thing distinct from the thing comprehended,” Halkin then (in the good company of many readers of the *Guide*) draws the mistaken inference that Maimonides (like Plato) held that there *were* distinct “Ideas” that alone could be comprehended by the intellect (95, quoting *Guide*, 1.48). But to understand what a thing is, for Maimonides, means understanding something of the character that inheres within or defines it, not having recourse to some “metaphysical” realm where the separate, disembodied “Ideas” abide. Wisdom, therefore, can be attained in this world and need not be deferred to the world to come (as part of its reward). Still, Halkin rightly concludes that, for Maimonides, “the philosophically lived life. . . is its own recompense” just as the “life lived in pursuit of material goods and pleasures. . . is its own retribution” (96).

It was the austere and “unrewarding” nature of Maimonides’s philosophical approach, Halkin suggests, that led to (greater interest in) the Zohar’s more mystical approach, which ultimately constitutes a “rebellion against philosophy” (102). Halkin underplays the importance of his own argument here. For he here demonstrates that Jewish hostility to philosophy ultimately stems not (as the rabbis from Talmudic times on have suggested) from its character as “*epikourses*” (the hedonism that Maimonides also rejects) but from its failure to satisfy the longing for eternal life (at least for the nonphilosophers).

Accordingly, the Zohar posits that the soul preexists this life and so can exist after it parts with the body (103). This, we might note, marks a certain return of Neoplatonism to Judaism.

The vast majority of the features of the afterlife are presented as being designed to answer the questions “How can one be *zocha* (worthy) of a good ‘portion’ of the afterlife?” and “In what might a ‘good portion’ consist?” Yet Halkin suggests, at the very end of his ruminations, that a response to a certain animal-like cry against the utter oblivion that death seems to decree on us all may be the most fundamental human need of all. Rather than place this cry in the mouth of some nobody (who might have good reason to fear the afterlife and thus be open to the charge of special pleading), the Jewish tradition (as Halkin points out) places this most pathetic cry (of “let me live at any cost”) in the mouth of none other than Moses, surely the most morally worthy (in spite and because of his also being the most humble) of men. Halkin offers a detailed discussion of the famous Midrash (Yalkut Shi’moni on Deut. 31) recounting Moses’s extended bargaining with God so that he might not die before entering the Promised Land (or, indeed, that he might not die at all). Moses, we are told, first prayed repeatedly and so deftly and movingly that God had to close the gates of heaven, lest the divine plan be overturned. Moses then began “arguing” with God (210). Appealing to the biblical injunction not to deny workers their due wages, Moses suggests he has earned, through his unstinting leadership of the Israelites for forty years, the chance to see the Promised Land. Silently accepting Moses’s premise (that leading the Israelites was a sacrifice and not a goodly gift proffered by God), God suggests He can hardly reward Moses in the hereafter if He rewards him (to such an extent? at all?) now. Yet Moses would prefer life at almost any cost to the hereafter, even when guaranteed by God. At this point, Moses offers a series of ever more degrading transformations he would be willing to undergo in order to stay alive: he would become a beast of the field or a bird that flitters about. (This part of the argument seems to agree with the classical Jewish teaching that “we” are our “souls,” our bodies being merely temporary clothing in this life.) This request denied, Moses (seemingly descending one more rung) asks that his *body* (“this face,” “these legs,” “these arms”) be rewarded and not be made “to lick the dust.” This request too being denied, Moses responds to God’s decree that the time for Joshua’s leadership has come with the plaintive offer that he become Joshua’s student. But just as a transformation into a “beast” or a “bird” would render Moses no longer Moses (and thus incapable of gaining the reward for which he had sacrificed), so too would unlearning his profound wisdom (necessary to become Joshua’s

student) render him no longer Moses. And God, perhaps not a little cruelly, allows Moses to see this. He takes Moses up on his final offer, and sends him to learn from Joshua. But Moses, to his great dismay, cannot understand. Or rather, he cannot understand *Joshua's* lessons. God's lesson, with what seems to be crushing weight and finality, is learned: Moses offers his life to God.

But, in fact, the lesson is still not learned! One after the other, Moses frightens off the various angels (including ultimately the angel of death) sent by God to end his life and bring him to God's side. In the end, God Himself must descend from heaven and convince Moses that he must now die. "None of Judaism's consolations," Halkin observes, "mean a thing to him" (214). Yet, while this is obviously so in one sense, is not something about Judaism's relative downplaying of the afterlife integral to its far more favorable view of (this worldly) life than most any other religion?

Of all the distinctions Halkin draws between the Jewish view of death and those of other cultures, perhaps none is as striking and important as the Jewish insistence on not "conceding to death too much" (22). That is, Jews are taught always to love life and to insure that their response to death—and view of the afterlife—never tempts them to "mortify the flesh" or even to welcome suicide (as did many early Christians and some contemporary Muslims) as a quicker and surer route to paradise. Halkin quotes Maimonides's statement (from his *Laws of Mourning*) that "a person should not go to too great lengths over his dead" (133), a sentiment that would not be out of place in Plato's "city in speech" in the *Republic*. Perhaps this is connected to the fact that, with regard to the afterlife, "the God of Israel was more merciful than the God of the Christians" (115). For He seems to permit post-deathbed conversions, or rather, permits the additional year of suffering in Gehenna as sufficient atonement prior to being allowed after all into the world to come. (Halkin also discusses the postbiblical innovation of saying Kaddish, the prayer for the dead, whose faithful recital by the dead's offspring can have a beneficial impact on the soul of the dead person. In particular, our tears can ensure that the dead's soul is judged by mercy and not strict justice: 157). Life itself, with all its trials, is good for Jews, for it is only there that one can become worthy of eternal life, by meeting and overcoming those very trials. And it is only through worthiness, it seems, that one can earn the eternal life one craves (116).

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The recently published *Brill's Companion to Leo Strauss' Writings on Classical Political Thought* is both a very useful and an engaging book. It can provide a fruitful introduction to new readers of Leo Strauss, but it also addresses difficult and substantial problems that arise in Strauss's interpretations. Hence this volume surely is an indispensable reading for every conscientious student of the thought of Strauss—for Strauss's thinking can be faithfully summed up as a "tentative or experimental" (CM 11) attempt to recover classical political rationalism and most of his writings are indeed commentaries on core texts of ancient political philosophy.

In the editor's introduction, Timothy W. Burns summarizes Strauss's intellectual path by highlighting the key points of his critique of modernity and attempt to recover ancient political thought. As any reader of Strauss knows, what motivated such a return is the twofold contemporary threat to the very possibility of philosophy, and hence of political philosophy: positivism and historicism. Since positivism, once examined, "transforms itself into historicism" (WIPP 25), Burns is right to mainly address historicism. First, he presents us with an account of Hegel's philosophy of history (as the chief representative of what can be called "rational historicism" [see, e.g., 153]). He also makes clear that *stricto sensu*, the Hegelian view of history, since it esteems itself the absolute standpoint and thus does not historicize itself, is not historicism (10). But by "inventing" the historical consciousness (7), Hegel prepared its radicalization—mainly through the German Historical

School, which finally led to the oblivion of any transcendent truth outside of history, that is, to historicism (11). But whereas the idea of an absolute moment in history may seem fairly difficult to establish, historicism proper struggles with an even more severe problem: if every truth must be confined to its historical situation or epoch, should it not be that the epoch wherein this broader “truth” was discovered is superior to the previous ones? Hence, historicism dithers between the denial of any absolute moment and the need of an absolute moment. According to Strauss, this confusion led to the rejection of “theory” (12, cf. *NRH* 26). Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s severe critiques of philosophy in favor of a somehow poetic thinking are testimonies of this contemporary crisis of modern rationalism. As Burns stresses, “modern political philosophy” “began as an alternative to classical political philosophy but ended up with a farewell to reason” (2). Hence, to recover reason meant in one way or another to recover ancient philosophy.

Following the “unsuccessful” attempts of both Husserl and Heidegger, Strauss aimed to recover in the ancients “the natural world” or “the pre-scientific world,” as opposed to the abstract consciousness characteristic of modern science and philosophy (16). Since the classical philosophers thought in a world that was not yet “infused” or altered by science (17), their writings are able to display *the emergence of the scientific or philosophic life from the political and moral and religious life that constitutes the core of this natural world*. Hence, unlike most phenomenological inquiries into ancient thought, Strauss’s recovery of classical thinkers is marked by the recovery of “*political philosophy*, as a necessary ‘preliminary’ to philosophy proper” (3). Grounding science or philosophy in the natural world, that is, in the city, means that philosophical inquiry must take as its starting point the moral and political opinions that constitute the prescientific realm. The philosopher founded the philosophic life not, as Heidegger thought, on the grounds of a metaphysics of presence, but rather conceiving of it as following from the principle of sufficient reason—*ex nihilo nihil fit*. But as Burns points out, “it remains true that one cannot justify science or philosophy if its ‘presupposition,’ the principle of sufficient reason or cause, is merely the result of a choice or decision, rather than demonstrated” (20). This amounts to saying that political philosophy must examine these opinions: it must be dialectical (25). The philosopher who engages in such dialectical inquiry will recognize soon enough that most of the sets of opinions that he encounters are self-contradictory or lead to contradictions,¹ and he will thus recognize in the very act of philo-

¹ Hence, if the philosopher does not want to hold the principle of causality as self-evident, he can

sophical dialogue that “his is the right path” (26). Strauss thence discovered that political philosophy, as a politically immersed rational inquiry, was the approach ancient philosophers took in order to establish the veracity of their way of life, the way of a rational understanding of nature as an intelligible whole, in contradistinction to the “theological” way of thinking and living.² He most certainly thought that this dialectical way was a better way than the modern critique of religion, which was practically powerful but theoretically insufficient. Strauss was thus led by his intimate concern with the “theological-political problem” to examine ancient texts.

Brill's Companion to Leo Strauss' Writings on Classical Political Thought offers its readers a series of essays that present and thoughtfully interpret almost every one of Strauss's writings on classical political philosophy.³ The volume is divided into six parts: part 1 is dedicated to Strauss's texts on pre-Socratic thought, part 2 to classical political philosophy in general, and parts 3–6 to Aristophanes, Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle, respectively. I cannot in this review provide a sufficiently detailed account of each of the chapters. I will rather attempt to sketch an outline of the main issues discussed in these essays.

1. THE PROBLEMS OF PRE-SOCRATIC THOUGHT

In chapter 1, Gregory A. McBrayer examines the third chapter of *Natural Right and History*, “The Origin of the Idea of Natural Right.” By focusing on the emergence of this Socratic Idea, Strauss, in fact, discusses the grounding out of which the idea of natural right was possible, that is, the discovery of nature (*phusis*). In fact, the idea of nature as a principle of intelligibility is required if there is to be something like a natural right. The discovery of nature, Strauss argues, proceeded from a twofold distinction: that “between hearsay and seeing with one's own eyes” and that between what was

demonstrate it only by relying on the principle of contradiction, and more generally on logic. Whereas Burns correctly notes that Heidegger “avoids addressing” or implicitly rejects causality (20), one may also note that he somehow rejects—or at least puts explicitly on hold—the principle of contradiction (and hence logic altogether, *die allgemeine “Logik”*) as well. See Martin Heidegger, *Was ist Metaphysik?*, in *Wegmarken*, GA 9, 107. There seems to be here indeed a kind “farewell to reason.”

² The question whether, according to Strauss, the political philosopher may ever succeed in moving beyond political philosophy to “philosophy proper” is one that unfortunately remains unanswered, both in the volume and in this review, but perhaps in Strauss's writings too.

³ The following texts are not discussed: the chapter of Strauss's *What Is Political Philosophy?* entitled “On Classical Political Philosophy”; the last conference on “The Problem of Socrates” dedicated to Plato and the Poets; the chapters of *Xenophon's Socrates* on Xenophon's *Apology of Socrates to the Jury*; *Xenophon's Socratic Discourse* (Strauss's interpretation of the *Oeconomicus*); the review of W. P. Henry on the *Hellenika* entitled “Greek Historians”; and Strauss's published course on Plato's *Symposium*.

man-made and what was not (35; *NRH* 88). Hence, at first, the discovery of nature stood in contradistinction, and even in opposition, to convention (*nomos*). This state of things, however, leads to an apparent paradox, for the discovery of nature that is required in order to discover natural right seems to stand against the realm of human conventions, the realm of the political in which things are said to be right or wrong.

In fact, this seeming disjunction between natural and man-made beings led the pre-Socratic thinkers to look with contempt on conventions. The standard of nature appeared so bright that it led to moral and political conventionalism, which is *mutatis mutandis* the ancient equivalent of modern legal positivism: justice and injustice are nothing else than mere conventional agreements between human beings (38–39). Even if he rejects it in the end, Strauss recognizes the strength of the conventionalist doctrine. Indeed, in the light of the stability and order of the whole of nature, our earthly standards of justice are very changeable. Yet the idea of natural right requires that “the principles of right are not unchangeable” (39). But according to Strauss, the variability of positive right is not sufficient to establish the impossibility of natural right. Even this variability suggests that something permanent lies behind or beyond it: as McBrayer puts it, “the perennial disagreements that arise over the question of natural right reveal a genuine perplexity, a *permanent* or fundamental problem” (40, my emphasis). Is this to say that natural right is a problem or a question? The fact that Strauss speaks of it in terms of an “Idea” might allow us to think so (see, e.g., *WIPP* 39). Socratic natural right would thus appear not as a dogmatic teaching on justice, but as openness to the possibility of a natural standard of justice beyond conventions.

The problem with the derivative political teaching of the pre-Socratics is that they suppose that the city is a mere fiction. Since justice is inextricably linked with the common good of the city, if the city is purely artificial, there would be no natural right (40–41). Does this mean that Socratic philosophy, by contrast, holds the city to be natural? Not exactly: Socrates does not know if the city truly *is* natural, but neither does he presuppose that it *is not* natural. There is, in fact, a tension in the writings of Socratic political philosophy concerning that very issue, a tension that Strauss’s commentaries often help to bring up (cf. 45). This presupposition of pre-Socratic philosophy is embedded in a deeper or broader presupposition. The artificial character of the political community was held by those thinkers in the light of a specific view of nature. It would indeed seem that in order to *assert* the unnaturalness of the political, one must *know* what are the principles of nature. The pre-Socratics

assumed that they knew those principles (43), that they had replaced divine providence with the true cosmological doctrines. The Socratic philosophical attitude stands skeptical in the face of such assumption: Strauss indeed says that Socrates did not presuppose any specific cosmology and that his knowledge of ignorance on this matter allowed him to “view man in the light of the mysterious character of the whole” (*WIPP* 38–39). Such a view, McBrayer writes, “does not presuppose the existence of eternal imperishable first principles and is not reductionist, insofar as it preserves the natural phenomena by recognizing that the nature of a thing is the character of the class of being to which that thing belongs as distinguished from the character of other classes of beings” (43). This Socratic nondogmatic ontology, which Strauss encapsulates in the name “noetic heterogeneity,” enables one to recognize the peculiar character of being of human affairs or of political things (*ta politika*, *ta anthrōpina*) without presupposing their naturalness or unnaturalness. By doing so, Socrates opens the possibility of a genuine philosophizing, that is, a rational inquiry in the light of the standard of nature or intelligibility, on political affairs: he is the founder of political philosophy.

In his conclusion, McBrayer argues that “the origin of the idea of natural right seems to be rooted in the human desire to defend justice when its existence has been called into doubt by the discovery of nature and the attendant distinction between nature and convention” (47). Even if one might wonder if this origin is not instead rooted in a desire to *understand* or to *know* justice rather than simply to defend it, this surely helps us understand why the chief representatives of pre-Socratic thought discussed in Strauss’s works—and in this volume—are historically a “co-Socratic” (Thucydides) and a “post-Socratic” (Lucretius). Pre-Socratic philosophy is not a mere historical moment of philosophy: “Socratic philosophizing” “is always in danger of being lost” by falling either into the pitfall of the philosophic conventionalism (47) of pre-Socratic natural philosophy or into that of the prephilosophical natural attitude, between which political philosophy stands in a very fragile equilibrium.

Chapter 2 deals with Strauss’s writings on Thucydides. But Thucydides does not seem to fit with the aforementioned natural philosophers who show only contempt for the realm of *ta politika*. In fact, Clifford Orwin notes at the outset that “for the mature Strauss, it seems, any differences between Thucydidean ‘history’ and Socratic ‘philosophy’ are outweighed by their common commonsensicality” (53). Nevertheless, the political history of Thucydides is said by Strauss to “supplement” pre-Socratic natural philosophy while Thucydides takes “his cosmic bearings from Heraclitus” (52). To

address Thucydides as a pre-Socratic thus requires that one understand the relationship between these cosmic bearings and political thought. Light is shed on this relationship when one's attention is drawn with Strauss to the question of piety and the gods in Thucydides's work.

Throughout Strauss's commentaries on Thucydides, the dialectic between rest and motion is a constant theme. Whereas the political philosopher such as Plato or Aristotle presents us with the city "at rest," Thucydides displays the city, nay cities, "in motion." His history offers a portrait of the greatest war which is supposed to be understood as the biggest motion, but which as such can arise only after the longest time of peace, the greatest rest. The Peloponnesian War opposed Sparta and Athens, the former being the conservative city of moderation—the city at rest—and the latter being the daring city of progress—the city in motion. What are these dialectical oppositions supposed to mean? It looks as if Strauss enjoins us to seek the Thucydidean understanding of nature in his appreciation of Sparta and Athens, that is, in his interpretation of the war that opposed these two cities. Indeed, "the crucial dualities of Thucydides' work...are aspects of his teaching on nature" (57).

Sparta is the city of moderation and piety and those virtues provide to its regime the stability required in order "to protect its own," which, according to Strauss, is the reason for Thucydides's humane admiration for the Lacedaemonians (56). But the fact that Sparta is a very pious political community problematizes this admiration. For it would seem that the stability of this city somehow stands on its being oriented toward something other than itself, and this fact reveals the importance of the "fundamental orientation of the *polis* toward the transpolitical" (57). As Orwin says, "this orientation would be unproblematic (and simply favorable to Sparta) only if the character of the transcendent were so" (57). The final appreciation of Sparta on Thucydides's part would thus depend on its view of God(s) or the divine law being the correct one. But his observations on the Lacedaemonians' attitude at war reveal something paradoxical about their city: whereas their moderation and conservatism condemn "musical" education in favor of martial discipline, their piety is the source of many military errors and failures. This Spartan paradox indicates that there may be something misleading about their conception of the divine law.

But this critique of Sparta does not lead Thucydides to an unqualified praise of Athens. Even though he is himself "Thucydides the Athenian" and esteems gratefully Athens's way in culture and education, his historical work shows quite uniquely the defects of Athenian daring. Whereas this daring

bears fruit in a time of peace when it infuses and stimulates thinkers and poets, it also comprises a tendency toward *hubris*, which finally led Athens, in its imperial growth, to self-destruction (67–68). This Athenian tragedy suggests a punishment of this *hubris*. In other words, the Athenians were not pious enough whereas the Spartans were too pious. In Sparta, the gods held its citizen to strong limits; in Athens, the daring of the divine things led to the fading away of any sense of limits.

This diagnosis leads Strauss to think that “for Thucydides, the pious understanding... is true if for the wrong reasons: not the gods but nature sets limits to what the city can attempt” (68). The divine law does not require Spartan piety, nor does it allow Athenian *hubris*, but an awareness of the limits that are brought about by “the divine law properly understood,” that is, the natural “interplay of rest and motion” which as such “subsume[s] the divine” (63, 58). Hence, the teaching of Thucydides about the gods is not really interested in their existence but rather tries to show their political relevance (73). But reduced to this cosmic teaching about motion and rest, as Orwin points out, the divine law “is neither divine nor a law” properly speaking (73). Hence Thucydides’s political theorizing seems to be constructed indeed on, or to take its bearings from, some cosmic teaching. Even though the extent to which these bearings are truly Heraclitean is not clear, it appears that the Greek historian shares with the other pre-Socratics a purported *knowledge* of a cosmological or “theological” kind (cf. 74).

In chapter 3, James H. Nichols discusses Strauss’s “Notes on Lucretius.” Strauss’s main concern here again is the Epicurean critique of religion. Lucretius’s explicit claim is that such a critique helps one to get rid of the fear of the gods (77). Such a fear can be overcome by a genuine knowledge of the first causes in nature, by a truthful account of *de rerum natura*. Lucretius’s and Epicurus’s atomist view is supposed to provide the knowledge that should bring our human souls to be at peace, that is, that should repeal fear and pain. However, Strauss notes that in aiming at a critique of religion, Lucretius silences the fact that there might also be something comforting in the theological account of the world. The idea of divine creation implies that the world is a closed, finite universe. The place of human beings in such a *cosmos* is, if not easy to discover, ultimately determinable. The limitedness of the world allows thinking it as an *ordered* world. Order is more comforting than chaos (87).

However, Lucretius’s physiology stipulates the infinity of the universe. Once he grasps this truth, man starts to hear the “crackings of the walls of the world.” He also understands that his own being, including the human soul,

is but a specific configuration of moving atoms. Man, his soul, and *even the gods* are all made of atoms and hence perishable (90). Only the first principles, the atoms, are eternal. And as such, they follow no direction. The teaching that is supposed to provide the pleasure of serenity is perhaps more likely to breed angst and despair. Even if the idea of punishing gods can be a fearful one, the providential care that it supposes can also satisfy the human aspiration for justice. How then is Lucretius's harsh view of nature compatible with his hedonic view of the good life?

In order to understand that question, one must note with Strauss that *De rerum natura* is a work of philosophy *and* poetry: "However sad the truth may be, to be the first who speaks about the sad truth in charming verses is not sad" (86). The harsh teaching may be pleasant to some degree if it is "sweetened" by poetry. Hence, Lucretius surpasses Epicurus since he understands the truth but also understands the proper way to reveal it (92). By doing so, he shows that he understands the human soul (93), and more precisely the *difference* between the types of human souls: the bitterness of Epicureanism must be harsher for some, and easier to accept for others. One may think that for the nonphilosopher, Lucretius's teaching must be sweetened since it is in some respects "much harsher than the teaching of religion" (91), but that for the Epicurean philosophers, Lucretius's poetry only adds to the pleasure of understanding. This implicit difference between philosophers and nonphilosophers in Strauss's account of Lucretius seems to imply that the only true hedonism is the philosophic life. Given this difference and its corresponding poetic rhetoric, one is inclined to think that there is something of the Platonic way of philosophizing in Lucretius. At first sight, though, one must note that he is communicating a teaching that claims to be the final and complete truth, which seems incompatible with Socrates's refusal to commit to any specific cosmology or theology. In this respect and despite being historically a post-Socratic, Lucretius is indeed a pre-Socratic philosopher.

However, Nichols's careful reading helps us to see that Strauss is not absolutely certain about that: the latter "notes occasional Lucretian sayings that suggest that he might not be the simply Epicurean dogmatist that he seems, for he is still seeking truth about nature" (93). This suggests that Strauss might see a greater community of mind than a break between Socratic and pre-Socratic philosophy. Perhaps he thinks that if we are able to look behind their apparent doctrines, we will meet genuine philosophical souls.⁴

⁴ Heinrich Meier, for instance, argues that according to Strauss, these doctrines are ultimately exoteric teachings relatively unimportant compared to their authentic and inexhaustible philosophical

2. RECOVERING CLASSICAL POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

The next section of the *Companion* offers a portrait of classical political philosophy. Since this expression in Strauss's work is often equivalent to "ancient political philosophy," Timothy Burns introduces us in chapter 4 to one of Strauss's essays that covers most broadly this theme. "The Liberalism of Classical Political Philosophy," a critical review of Havelock's *The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics*, deals with Aeschylus, Sophocles, Plato, and Antiphon. Strauss's severe critique of Havelock enables us to see his own understanding of the unity of ancient political thought. Havelock's very "poor scholarship" aims at making ancient authors modern liberals and by doing so, blurs the fundamental differences between the ancients and the moderns. In Burns's summary, according to Strauss pre-Socratics and Socratics alike share "the recognition of the need to show that first things (whatever they might be) are not gods; recognition of the antithesis of nature and *nomos*; recognition of the deceptive character of the 'world' of *nomos*; and recognition of the crucial philosophic need to accept one's mortality and that of all human accomplishment" (125). To recover classical political philosophy requires that one liberate oneself from the blinding and naive modern idea of progress (or any other version of historicism) and to examine the possibility that the aforementioned ancient roots of philosophy are the healthy ones. For Strauss, those are indeed the only ones on the basis of which philosophic activity can arise as something truly different from the (modern) sophistic subordination of knowledge to practical political purposes.

Chapter 5 examines Strauss's attempt to display such a political philosophizing in the chapter of *Natural Right and History* entitled "Classic Natural Right." Devin Stauffer first stresses the importance of the Socratic turn, for Strauss argues that grasping the natural articulation of the whole in terms of noetic heterogeneity "permitted and favored the study of the human things as such" (134–35). It permitted it by acknowledging that the human things are different in kind from other natural beings or divine beings, and it favored it by recognizing that this articulation of the whole is necessarily one that is mediated by men: an inquiry into *ta anthrōpina* is meant to examine to what extent and under what conditions our access to truth is distorted or not. The Socratic turn acknowledges that our articulation of the whole is mediated by the polis, by the prevailing opinions, and thus requires dialectical examination (135–36).

inquiries. See, e.g., Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, trans. Marcus Brainard (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 72–73.

This dialectical examination rejects the pre-Socratic conventionalism discussed above and tries instead to uncover the nature of the political community. In order to do so, the Socratics rejected the supposition of political and cultural relativism and *questioned* the variety of political associations by raising the question of the best regime (139). Their answer to this question was twofold. The best regime according to the classics is aristocracy, that is, the rule of the best men. Therefore, in the first place, the best regime is the rule of the wise. But ancient political thinkers knew that this regime was impractical. This brought them to think that the best regime in practice must be the second-best or a mixed regime, that is, the rule of the gentlemen (139). However, this dilution of natural right into the mixed regime reveals what Strauss calls “the problem of justice.” For the twofold answer to the question of the regime is also an implicit answer to the question of justice. The mixed regime implies that justice is, as the gentlemen hold it, “identical with citizen-morality” (141). But the dialectical inquiry through which natural right is supposed to be grounded easily puts into question the assumption that moral virtue is the highest goal: the philosopher in his dialectical ascent may very well think of civic virtues as “mere means to a life devoted to the pursuit of wisdom” (143). The problem of justice is the tension between justice understood as the moral and civic virtues and justice understood as a question, which directs oneself to a philosophic way of life. But to this latter understanding, natural right is “dynamite for civil society” (144). The necessity of the dilution of natural right both indicates the opposition between philosophy and politics and the need to assuage that opposition in practice. Strauss’s provocative interpretation asserts that such is the Socratic teaching endorsed by Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero alike.

According to Strauss, among the classics, only the Thomistic teaching on natural law stands apart from that view. The *main* difference, it seems, is that for Aquinas, natural law depends on the divine law, as revealed by the scriptures, whereas Socratic natural right is independent of any cosmological doctrine, and in particular of such a thing as biblical revelation (144–45). The difference amounts to the opposition between faith and rational skepticism, or to the theological-political problem. One must note that strictly speaking, Strauss’s writings do not consider Thomas as a representative of classical natural *right*.

In chapter 6, Jonathan F. Culp examines two other book reviews written by Strauss with the aim of showing further obstacles to a genuine recovery of the ancients. “On Collingwood’s Philosophy of History” shows the flaw of

a rationalist historicism that considers ancient thought from the (allegedly superior) standpoint of modernity (151). This, as Culp and Strauss stress, will inevitably distort the teachings of the ancients and make one “necessarily understand them differently than they understood themselves” (153). But the reverse attitude is as problematic. In “On a New Interpretation of Plato’s Political Philosophy,” Culp explains, Strauss shows that “too much eagerness...*in favor of the ancients*” can lead to direct applications of ancient thought to our contemporary situation, a transposition that could entail “disastrous consequences” (154). This point is crucial, for some critiques of Strauss have held that his return to the ancients was of that naive kind. Strauss, Culp clarifies, did not take the solutions of classical thinkers—if there are any—as answers to our modern questions: “We must *suspend* our own questions in order to discover what questions the classics posed, and we must be open to the possibility that our own questions ought to be discarded in favour of those asked by the ancients” (165, my emphasis). As the reader of the *Companion* shall see, Strauss’s investigations in the works of classical thinkers—Aristophanes, Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle—are by far more sensitive to the questions and problems than to answers or solutions.

3. SOCRATICS

3.1. ARISTOPHANES

Chapter 7, written by Christopher Baldwin, deals with Strauss’s complex and subtle treatment of Aristophanes. In doing so, he highlights the quarrel between philosophy and poetry. At first, Strauss leads his readers to believe that he considers this quarrel to be an opposition that can find a resolution only in the subordination of poetry to philosophy. Baldwin helps us see that the issue is far more complex. Aristophanes’s *Clouds* appears in Strauss’s reading not so much as an attack against Socrates as friendly advice (see 171). The Socratic turn to political philosophy would represent Socrates’s acknowledgment of that advice: an exhortation of philosophy to self-knowledge, which requires an awareness of the political situatedness of the philosopher and the consequent need for prudence and moderation throughout its inquiry. But not only is Socrates receptive to that lesson. Aristophanes, in Strauss’s eyes, explores in his plays the most Platonic questions, such as the question of justice, the relationship between the individual and the community, and the problem of the gods. He even seems to share the Socratic-Platonic insights about those issues. At one point, Baldwin suggests that Aristophanes’s laugh might be a comic image of the pure pleasure of understanding the nature

of things *through comedy* (see 176 and *RCPR* 115). Strauss ultimately would prompt us to see Aristophanes as a “kindred spirit who largely, but perhaps not entirely agreed with his Socrates” (187). Unfortunately, Baldwin does not clearly indicate what would be their slight disagreement, but one is perhaps permitted to think that the Platonic philosophical stance may be superior both to the tragic and comic view in light of the inherent tensions and problems of human life.

3.2. XENOPHON

The longest section of the *Companion* is dedicated to Strauss’s numerous works on Xenophon. It contains chapters on “The Problem of Socrates,” Strauss’s reading of the *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* (Richard S. Ruderman), on Strauss’s *On Tyranny* (Eric Buzzetti), and on his interpretations of the *Symposium* (Dustin Gish), the *Memorabilia* (Amy L. Bonnette), and the *Anabasis* (Devin Stauffer, Timothy W. Burns).

The key to Strauss’s reading, Ruderman argues, is that “Xenophon’s shallowness, upon examination, turns out to be strategic or ironic in nature” (195). Hence, Xenophon’s apparent apology of Socrates as a gentleman who above all promoted the practice of moral and civic virtues is but a distortion or an adornment of a more subversive philosophical activity: “Socrates was not ‘unqualifiedly just’” (203). Ruderman’s most thought-provoking insight, though, is that by arguing in favor of noetic heterogeneity, Xenophon’s Socrates provided Strauss with a “response to Heidegger,” as resistance to the “temptation of finding a single thing” (such as Being) “that compromised a unified answer to the question ‘what is’” (206). Moreover, Strauss’s Xenophontic Socrates thought that politics was the matrix of our understanding of such heterogeneity among beings, the reason why a thorough investigation of the human affairs, that is, political philosophy, is the necessary primary step of philosophy (see 208, 212). As for Strauss’s text entitled “The Spirit of Sparta or the Taste of Xenophon,” Ruderman stresses how important it is that the “or” be understood as disjunctive. Ironically praising Sparta, Xenophon would in fact show to the attentive reader his taste for a philosophical way of life that is altogether incompatible with martial and authoritarian regimes (214–15). The taste of Xenophon—and, one may add, the taste of Strauss—is one of moderation, for political moderation is essential to philosophy.

Eric Buzzetti introduces us to *On Tyranny* through the “problem of the Law.” Although Simonides and Hiero are two very different men, they have something in common: the poet and the tyrant are not gentlemen, and they do

not consider that the gentleman's moral and political horizon is the right one (see 241). Buzzetti asserts that "the subject of the *Hiero*" might be "the rejection of the gentleman, or what the gentleman stands for" (137). The gentlemen abide by the rule of law. The tyrant, on the contrary, deems himself above the law and replaces it by his own will. As such, tyranny is a far worse rule than the rule of gentlemen, but a certain "praise of tyranny, of tyranny at its best" could perhaps "point to the limits of law" (248). Strauss's analysis of the regime in *On Tyranny* reveals that the criterion of the good regime is virtue, and that true virtue or "philosophic gentlemanliness" such as Socrates's is possible even under a tyrannical rule, and hence "genuine virtue is not based upon law" (249). The teaching concerning tyranny hence is fairly similar to the lesson of Plato's *Republic*: the best regime is the rule of philosophers above law, but such a rule is extremely improbable, if not impossible. This teaching, however, brings its student right in the midst of a problem, that is, the tension between the private philosophic life and the political life. As Buzzetti notes, however, Strauss is as discreet or silent as Xenophon on the tyrannical (or "translegal") dimension of the teaching on the regime. This exoteric rhetoric has a twofold reason: political prudence, for this theme is indeed a very "delicate subject-matter," but perhaps more importantly a "pedagogic intention" (254) that would encourage the readers of *On Tyranny* to think for themselves, for such is the genuine path toward philosophy.

Dustin Gish focuses on the importance of Socrates's esoteric rhetoric in Strauss's commentary on the *Symposium* in order to reveal the hidden display of Socratic gentlemanliness (e.g. 269). The most memorable deed of this symposium, Gish argues, is the passage of the unique mutual laughter of Socrates and the other gentlemen. This deed is exemplary of Socratic wisdom for it raises the question of the cause or causes of this laughter: the common laughter conceals the different reasons for laughing, which point to the fact that Socrates is different from ordinary gentlemen (see 277). By pointing subtly to this crucial difference, Gish says, Xenophon makes us wonder "about the hidden thought of Socrates" (279). The fundamental deed of Socrates among gentlemen is thus his use of a rhetoric that reveals in a glimpse the activity of philosophy at the same time as it very prudently conceals it (283).

Amy Bonnette's introduction to Strauss's interpretation of the *Memorabilia* is almost as cryptic as Strauss's own text. One of the main concerns of this essay is to consider whether, according to Xenophon, "Socrates did not provide his unjust enemies with a motive for attacking him" (289). Moving painstakingly through Strauss's paraphrastic commentary, Bonnette seems

to some extent a critic of his suggestions (see, e.g., 285, 293n9, 297n12) and concludes on the following aporetic tone: Strauss “suggests that Socrates fell short of manliness because he did not surpass his enemies in harming them” without resolving “the problem of Socrates’ failure in self-defense” (300).

This problem, however, is central to the subsequent essays on Strauss’s interpretations of Xenophon’s *Anabasis*. There, Devin Stauffer discusses more extensively the issue at stake in this question: the difference between Xenophon and Socrates. As Bonnette already suggested, that difference has something to do with *thumos*. However, Xenophon was a Socratic and hence was aware of the shortcomings of an altogether thumotic soul. Stauffer hence tentatively but beautifully puts it thus: “in Homeric terms, Xenophon was no Achilles; he was much closer to Odysseus” (308). He was somehow a man of action with both deep philosophical insights and Socratic prudence. Indeed, Xenophon may have been not entirely satisfied with the Socratic life as a whole. Hence, he “quietly presents himself as an *alternative* to Socrates, as a man for whom it was *not true* that his deed, as distinguished from his speech and his thought, is nothing but playful” (312). In the next chapter, Timothy Burns explores further this distinction in the light of the question of divine justice in the *Anabasis*. Xenophon’s piety is ambiguous: it shows that he recognizes the human need for a divine support of justice, but that he is doubtful that there is such divine providence. Strauss indeed says that Xenophon’s piety is similar to a “combination of toughness, wittiness, and wiliness” (316). Turning from the theme of divine justice to justice simply, Burns notes that Strauss identifies Xenophon’s justice as standing between the views of the older Cyrus and Socrates (317). It would seem that by contrast to Cyrus’s justice, which is completely bound to one’s own political horizon, Socrates’s view that the just life is the philosophic life is absolutely transpolitical (and as such avoids the need to harm anyone). Xenophon is Socratic in the sense that he betrays his Greek roots for something that he esteems “more highly than Greece” (319). Fidelity to one’s own fatherland ultimately breeds contradictions and hence is “in practice impossible” (319). But, one may think, Xenophon’s justice is also like Cyrus’s since the will to found a city implies that justice is bound to the political.

3.3. PLATO

The next section of the *Companion* deals with Strauss’s writings on Plato’s *Republic* (Linda R. Rabieh), *Minos* (Robert Goldberg), *Euthyphro* (Wayne

Ambler), *Euthydemos* (Michael Rosano), the *Apology* and *Crito* (John C. Koritansky), and *Laws* (Mark J. Lutz).

Following up on the issue of Xenophon's foundation of a city in the *Anabasis*, Rabieh discusses Strauss's interpretation of the *Republic*. The essay focuses on the utmost importance of Thrasymachus to the action (*ergon*) of the dialogue, which is essential to shed light on its argument (*logos*). Strauss's reading shows that the discussion of Socrates with Thrasymachus at first is an opposition between the philosopher and the thesis of the city (326–30), but that it transforms progressively toward the need of the rule of the philosophers. Hence, Thrasymachus appears as “Socrates' potential ally” (330) for the establishment of the philosopher-kings will require the use of a very persuasive rhetoric (338). The “politics” of the *Republic* appears not as the foundation of the beautiful city (*kallipolis*) but as the taming of Thrasymachus, which represents a successful “political defense of philosophy,” an act of justice (343).

Strauss's essay on the *Minos* is dedicated, as Goldberg shows, to the relationship between the questions “what is Law ?” and *quid sit deus*. The reason the question of law is “the gravest” one is that it inevitably relates to the authority that prompts the goodness of the law. The ultimate problem is that the laws that are said to be of divine origin do not correspond to what a law is supposed to do, that is, to assign “each man's soul the food and toil best fitted for him” (353), putting immediately into question their divine character or origin. When examined, the divine laws “reveal not the gods but those human beings who need them” (355). But what is a good law, then? According to the preceding definition, a good law would be based on a *knowledge* of the soul. The problem is that Socratic inquiry does not provide us with such knowledge, and hence “Socrates' definition of law implies the view that law can *never* be more than the attempt to find out what is” (357): law, under the light of Socratic examination, becomes philosophy. The question of law places philosophy above “laws understood as morally binding commands” (358), in the sole path of questioning. And such a questioning cannot help but raise the question “what is?” and hence *quid sit deus*.⁵

Strauss looks at the treatment of that question in his discussion of piety in the *Euthyphro*, examined by Wayne Ambler. According to Strauss, Socrates shows here an attempt to replace the gods by the Ideas (362, 372, 378). The

⁵ On “what is a god?” being the “primary and most important” application of the question “what is?” consider Strauss's letter to Seth Benardete on May 17, 1961, quoted in Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, 27n42.

incoherence of Euthyphro's views is meant to make one progress toward a more coherent articulation of the first principles. First, Euthyphro does not show obedience to the gods, but an imitation of them, that is, of what they do (371). Facing the problem of the contradictions between the gods, he chose to imitate Zeus in harming his own father (372). But in choosing Zeus as the most just god, Euthyphro implicitly supposes that there is a standard of justice apart from the gods, an "idea," which Zeus himself merely imitates (372). Ambler then looks at the monotheist solution to this problem. Strauss thinks that "even a single god would have to be understood as being 'good or just or wise,'" implying again the existence of Ideas prior to God himself (373). Hence, true piety is "imitation, not obedience" "to the ideas as guiding the choice of whom or what to imitate" (375). This leads one to think that Socratic piety is or is very similar to Socratic philosophy.

Michael Rosano introduces Strauss's reading of the *Euthydemos*. The key to Strauss's interpretation here is to remember that Socrates is telling a story to Crito. Roughly, this story is a praise of Euthydemus and Dionysodoros's sophistic exhortation to virtue. In this praise, Socrates is ironic with Crito, for Crito is "not an erotic man" and "remains in the dark regarding philosophy" (380, 389). Since the two brothers and Socrates stand above mere moral or civic virtues (393), and more importantly since "many sophistic arguments imply Socratic questions" (394), Socrates is akin to them and perhaps sees a possibility of turning their eristics into philosophical dialectics (398). Crito clearly does not see this possibility, and hence declines Socrates's ironic invitation to join him and to study with the two brothers. Such reticence is a reflection of the difficulty—especially from an outside standpoint like Crito's—to distinguish between Socratic philosophy and sophistry. This difficulty prefigures Socrates's trial.

Strauss's treatment of this trial is an aim to reveal that there was something truly subversive in Socrates's way of life. As Koritansky puts it, "what Socrates means by piety is not identical to ordinary piety" (407): by putting into question the Delphic oracle, for instance, he shows a questioning rather than obedient stance toward the divine (406). Plus, Socrates adopted an arrogant and provocative attitude during his trial, which could not help him out. Especially in his second speech, he is "uncompromising" and seems to prompt his death sentence (see 412–13). Facing Crito's despair at the prospect of losing his old friend, Socrates speaks to him as if he were Athens's Laws. The general argument is not very cogent but it is meant to convince Crito, who was willing to do something illegal, that he should abide by the law of

his city. If Socrates would accept Crito's plan, Koritansky correctly notes, it would endanger the reputation of philosophy; by being instead a "righteous" "martyr of philosophy," Socrates will cause Crito to carry a good image of the philosopher. Socrates's argument with Crito has a political purpose, not a philosophic one (421–22).

But despite this prudent decision of Socrates, it seems that Plato could not help but imagine what it would have been like if Socrates did follow Crito's plan and leave Athens to philosophize elsewhere: Plato wrote the *Laws*, in which an "Athenian stranger" founds a city where the legislation concerning piety seems to make room for the Socratic kind of piety (426). But apart from this political dimension of the *Laws* (425), the dialogue includes what is according to Strauss a deeply philosophical part: the *Laws* is the dialogue in which the question *quit sit deus* is treated to the greatest extent. The "theology" of the *Laws*, however, implicitly rejects providential justice and traditional polytheism. As Mark Lutz writes, Plato's piety, perhaps by contrast with Socrates's, is one that "corrects, without undermining, the piety of men like Kleinias and Megillus" while bringing "to light the Athenian Stranger's rational piety" (440).

3.4. ARISTOTLE

The last chapter of the book is devoted to Strauss's rarely discussed interpretation of Aristotle. Susan D. Collins first retraces the crisis of the West described by Strauss that prompts the need to return to Aristotelian political science. Recovering Aristotle is crucial, for Aristotle's political science does not presuppose the scientific modification of our understanding of the political things but rather starts from the "common sense view" which is the genuine "basis or matrix" of any scientific understanding (453). But Strauss goes one step further in that direction when he affirms that "unlike Socrates, Aristotle establishes political science as a discipline independent of theoretical wisdom" (456). He clarifies this affirmation by saying that in Aristotle, political science is one discipline among many and that it has "its own guiding principles," that is, "prudence united with moral virtue" (456). This differentiates Aristotelian political *science* from Socratic political *philosophy*. Strauss, Collins notes, thinks that this difference is made possible by the fact that Aristotle "presuppose[s] or posit[s] independent and knowable 'first principles,' practical and theoretical, that ground the separate disciplines" (459). This apparent difference between a zetetic or dogmatic approach to the first principles would be reflected in the difference between the writing

of treatises and the writing of dialogues (459). Strauss even pushes further this distinction in order to indicate a continuation between Aristotle's philosophical intention and modernity: this sort of epistemological "optimism" or confidence (466), presumably compared to Socratic knowledge of ignorance, would have somehow prepared the project of modern political science. The moderns shared Aristotle's optimism concerning knowledge and its relation to happiness but did not think that nature, as it is, was sufficient for such happiness.⁶ By tracing the roots of modernity in the association of Aristotelian thought and biblical revelation (466–68), and by presenting Aristotelian metaphysics as a fertile ground for Christianity, Strauss leads one to wonder if he really thinks of Aristotelian political science as a desirable object of recovery or if it is only meant as a path towards the Socratic roots of philosophy.

CONCLUSION

Many more questions, themes, and details than what I have sketched here are discussed in this thorough volume. One flaw, if there is any, is that although Strauss's understanding of noetic heterogeneity is deeply and many times discussed, the Platonic theory of the Ideas, albeit mentioned and referred to in the context of the *Euthyphro*, is not examined. Since there might be here a very difficult though profoundly important theme, the reader may be dissatisfied with such absence. One might also regret that Strauss's complex interpretation of the relationship of continuity and discontinuity between Plato and Aristotle is but briefly alluded to in the last chapter—but doing otherwise would perhaps have required a thematic rather than textual approach to Strauss's writings on the ancients.

In sum, the reader of *Brill's Companion to Leo Strauss' Writings on Classical Political Thought* will learn a great deal about Strauss's thought and will also certainly stimulate his own thinking about and with the ancient thinkers. The authors of this important book have offered to every reader of Strauss, and perhaps more importantly to students of Lucretius, Thucydides, Aristophanes, Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle, a precious gift.⁷

⁶ See Catherine Zuckert and Michael Zuckert, *Leo Strauss and the Problem of Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 163.

⁷ This research was supported by the Fonds de Recherche du Québec—Société et Culture (FRQSC).

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