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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

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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 prescientific 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 Lacedemonians (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 Lacedemonians' 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 abut 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).

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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 Lacedemonians* (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

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[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 Euthydemos 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]

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[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).