

Interpretation

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Inquiries: (Ms.) Joan Walsh, Assistant to the Editor
INTERPRETATION, Queens College, Flushing, N.Y.
11367-1597, U.S.A. (718)997-5542 Fax (718) 997-5565

E Mail: interpretation_journal@qc.edu

Discussion: Two Views of Laurence Lampert's Leo Strauss and Nietzsche

Laurence Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), ix + 227 pages, \$22.50.

LAWRENCE CASSE

No reader of Strauss could deny that he took Nietzsche with the utmost seriousness. He is presented in Strauss's writings as a powerful critic of the rationalism of Socrates and Plato as well as the initiator of the third wave of modernity and therefore our foremost contemporary. Nietzsche appears in several presentations as the originator of a new kind of historicism, one that denies the rationality or completeness of the historical process. Although Nietzsche is the originator of the fact-value distinction, he did not follow the value relativism of some of his successors such as Weber. Strauss writes that "Nietzsche is *the* philosopher of relativism: the first thinker who faced the problem of relativism in its full extent and pointed to the way in which relativism can be overcome" (*The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, p. 24). While Strauss recognized Heidegger as the foremost and most thorough exponent of radical historicism in our century, he suggests that Nietzsche may have taken a somewhat different road in his attempt to resolve the dilemmas generated by historicism. In Strauss's view, "Heidegger merely gives a refined interpretation of modern historicism, 'anchors' it 'ontologically'. For with Heidegger, 'historicity' has made nature disappear *completely*, which however has the merit of consistency and compels one to reflect."¹ It appears that Strauss may have thought Nietzsche's attempted solution to the problems of historicism and relativism was more profound and philosophically interesting than those of his successors, whether or not his attempted solution is viable. And Nietzsche himself may have been more aware of the problematic nature of that solution than some of those who followed him.

Strauss's lifelong preoccupation with Nietzsche is evident and has been noted by a number of commentators. In what still remains one of the best studies of Strauss, Victor Gourevitch notes that "Strauss's explicit rejection of Nietzsche . . . must not be allowed to obscure the unstated but important affinities between his own and Nietzsche's critique of modernity."² A number of writers, ranging from irresponsible polemicists to more serious scholars, have suggested that a Nietzschean element might be at work in Strauss's mature thought or that he may be more sympathetic to Nietzsche than he initially ap-

pears. A serious study of the overall place of Nietzsche in Strauss's thought would be appear to be a prime desideratum, including the interpretation of one of his last enigmatic essays, "Note on the Plan of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*," his only published essay devoted exclusively to Nietzsche.³

In several presentations of the development of modernity Strauss suggests that difficulties inherent in the thought of the originators of modernity (Machiavelli, Hobbes, Descartes) led to subsequent attempts to overcome these difficulties through partial appropriation or return to the thought of the ancients combined with an increased radicalization of modern principles (*What is Political Philosophy?* p. 50). Spinoza, regarded by Nietzsche as one of his predecessors, was "the first great thinker who attempted a synthesis of pre-modern (classical-medieval) and modern philosophy" (*Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, p. 240). But it is Rousseau who ushers in the second wave of modernity. It is this attempt to appropriate elements of the thought of the classics on the basis of a radicalization of modernity that accounts for the many paradoxes in Rousseau's thought; such paradoxes, Rousseau thought, "must be made when one thinks seriously." Strauss suggested that nearly all the "serious difficulties with which the understanding of Rousseau's teachings remain beset . . . can be traced to the fact that he tried to preserve the classical idea of philosophy on the basis of modern science."⁴

Can a similar attempt to combine elements of advanced modernity with the thought of antiquity account for many of the paradoxical features of Nietzsche's thought? Nietzsche attempts to recapture the high spirituality of men like Pascal on the basis of the most radical atheism. Nietzsche would appear to put forward all-embracing metaphysical hypotheses (the will to power and eternal return) while denying the possibility of any metaphysics on the basis of a radical perspectivism. He attempts to return to certain aspects of the Platonic conception of the philosopher while undertaking the most radical critique of Socrates and "Platonism." He advocates a Spinozistic determinism and the apparent fatalism of the eternal return along with a celebration of human freedom as will to power and value creation. He points to the "great stupidity" of "instinct" while claiming that the soul is malleable with no natural limits. Nietzsche speaks of a return to nature or the natural while insisting that the world is will to power "and nothing else besides." Moreover, this thought culminates in the book which Nietzsche insisted was his most important, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in a bewildering array of parables, mock-biblical speeches, and poetic dithyrambs.

The attempt to resolve some of these paradoxes has led to a number of conflicting interpretive strategies. In an influential but controversial interpretation Heidegger read Nietzsche as the last metaphysician and his conception of will to power as still caught up in a Platonic tradition of Being as determinate presence—a tradition that Nietzsche failed to overcome. More recent French thought since the 1960s has focused on Nietzsche as the propagator of philosophical thought that shatters traditional metaphysical notions of subjectivity,

hierarchy, causality, and identity; on this basis Nietzsche can be used, contrary to his intent, to support views closer to the political Left than the Right. Indeed, in an age devoted to increasing egalitarianism in all its forms, it would appear that interest in Nietzsche is greater than ever.

In his new study, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche*, Laurence Lampert presents a detailed paragraph-by-paragraph reading of Strauss's "Note" and an overall interpretation of the place of Nietzsche in Strauss's thought. In this last essay, Lampert argues, Strauss resolved the most difficult interpretative issues regarding Nietzsche and presented his own final opinion of him. But Lampert claims that "from a Straussian point of view the essay is a scandal" (p. 11). Why so? Because, he claims, on the basis of a detailed reading of the "Note" it can be shown that nearly all other discussions of Nietzsche in Strauss's published writings are deliberately misleading or exoteric or at best incomplete. According to Lampert, a close reading of the "Note" shows that Strauss and Nietzsche are in fundamental agreement on nearly every philosophical issue. The disagreements have more to do with the public presentation of that teaching: "the primary reservation must lie precisely where Strauss placed the greatest emphasis, on the proper politics for philosophy today. This, it seems to me, is the fundamental difference between Nietzsche and Strauss" (p. 167).

Perhaps Lampert's most central claim is that Nietzsche is not an historicist but a "naturalist" of some kind and that Strauss realized this as well. In *Beyond Good and Evil* and elsewhere, Nietzsche put forward a new conception of nature and human nature which was meant to be "eternal" and nonhistorical and could thus serve as a standard for an order of ranking of men and human institutions. Nietzsche also fully recognized the art of esoteric writing used by philosophers in the past and described in detail by Strauss; Strauss and Nietzsche are not that far apart in their reading of Plato. The contrast of Plato and Nietzsche made in Strauss's essay and elsewhere masks their common goal which Strauss also understood: "What was Nietzsche's intent? To rule the world. Nietzsche had the same intent as Plato. To ascend to a secret spiritual kingship that could no longer be as secret as Plato's spiritual kingdom" (p. 128). The fundamental issue for both Plato and Nietzsche was whether philosophy or religion will rule. (Lampert's description of Plato here and elsewhere is reminiscent of D'Alembert's description of Descartes as secret leader of a vast conspiracy.)

According to Lampert, Strauss fully endorses the Nietzschean turn in morals as both natural and rational (p. 64). His "Note" also demonstrates the rationality and logical connection between Nietzsche's doctrines of will to power and eternal return. In the second half of *Beyond Good and Evil*, he presents a new teaching about nature, albeit one different from the traditional *göttliche Natur*, supposedly initiated by Plato, which forms a standard for ranking men and events. Nietzsche's teaching is a new form of naturalism, for he too spoke of a "return to nature." This new teaching about nature is nonhistoricist in that it

speaks of eternal truths. It forms the ultimate justification for the acceptance of the doctrine of eternal recurrence and the Nietzschean demand for a new rule by a spiritual aristocracy of the “complementary man.” This naturalism, according to Lampert, is far from the doctrine of human self-making required by historicism. “A coherent naturalism distinguishing high and low as noble and base emerges as a now reasonable alternative to the old antinaturalism or supernaturalism which called the high göttlich or eternal and the low earthly and mortal” (p. 64). This new teaching about nature also supplements and corrects the mechanistic excesses of modern science and does not demand the conquest of nature or technology. Finally, Lampert claims that Nietzsche’s teaching can provide the viable basis for a new politics based on “loyalty to the earth” and a new world religion based on Dionysian gods.

Lampert recognizes that his presentation of Strauss’s interpretation of Nietzsche contradicts nearly all of Strauss’s own published statements on Nietzsche. To explain why this is so he turns to the concluding paragraph of the lecture “What is Political Philosophy?” where, with Lampert’s characteristic exaggeration, Nietzsche is said to be presented as “the target of a patriot’s ferocious denunciation” and “denounced as a philosophical criminal of the first magnitude” (pp. 7–8).

Being certain of the tameness of modern western man, [Nietzsche] preached the sacred right of “merciless extinction” of large masses of men with as little restraint as his great antagonist had done. He used much of his unsurpassable and inexhaustible power of passionate and fascinating speech for making his readers loathe, not only socialism and communism, but conservatism, nationalism and democracy as well. After having taken upon himself this great political responsibility he could not show his readers a way toward political responsibility. He left them no choice except that between irresponsible indifference to politics and irresponsible political options. He thus prepared a regime which, as long as it lasted, made discredited democracy look again like the golden age. (*What is Political Philosophy?*, pp. 54–55)

Lampert claims that he cannot find the words “merciless extinction” in Nietzsche’s writings and that this is a clue that the entire paragraph is exoteric and does not reflect Strauss’s real opinion. But in the discussion of the *Birth of Tragedy* in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche writes:

Let us look ahead a century; let us suppose my attempt to assassinate two millennia of anti-nature and desecration of man were to succeed. That new party of life which would tackle the greatest of all tasks, the attempt to raise humanity higher, including the merciless annihilation (*schonunglose Vernichtung*) of everything that was degenerating and parasitical, would again make possible that excess of life on earth from which the Dionysian state, too, would have to waken again. (*Ecce Homo*, ‘Why I Write Such Good Books,’ *The Birth Of Tragedy*, sec. 4)

But this is merely an instance of a larger point. Clearly, Nietzsche would have despised Hitler's regime of antisemitism and nationalism. But Lampert simply cannot believe that there could be any possible connection between Nietzsche and the political extremes, nor can he admit that Nietzsche's rhetoric may have dangerous consequences, for this would mean there still may good reasons for restraint in public speech, if not for esotericism. So Strauss's claim that Nietzsche may have inadvertently prepared the way for Hitler's regime appears to him so fantastic that he dismisses it as exoteric, ignoring the fact that Strauss plausibly makes the same point elsewhere.⁵ Lampert must dismiss such claims because of his belief that a new politics, based on the 'Nietzschean Enlightenment' is both possible and benign for humanity at large. And he must find 'political' motives behind those remarks of Strauss on Nietzsche that will not fit his interpretation.

THE USE AND DISADVANTAGE OF ESOTERICISM

The task of judging the correctness of Lampert's interpretation is made more difficult by his relentless hyperbole and exuberant rhetoric. Lampert is constantly making rhetorical promises he is never able to deliver on; he is constantly announcing forthcoming revelations that never appear. We are promised the deepest, most radical confrontations between the deepest, the greatest, most profound thinkers in which the deepest, greatest, most profound problems are going to be shown to be solved, and so on. Strauss, supposedly the greatest opponent of Nietzsche, is going to be revealed as really the greatest disciple of Nietzsche. And all this is to be done in a commentary on Strauss's essay which, needless to say, is simply the most important essay on Nietzsche ever written. Lampert is like a bad boxing promoter whose fighters never show up, and we leave disappointed.

No doubt, Strauss's essay requires the most careful reading, and Lampert is correct to point to such devices as "blunders, centerings, silences, repetitions" that Strauss may have used in the "Note." But a few remarks about the "literary character" of the "Note" are in order. Throughout the essay Strauss uses Nietzsche's terminology and concepts: even when discussing Plato such terms appear as "value judgement," "pure mind," "ideal" many of which he criticizes elsewhere, as in his critique of Weber. If this essay represents Strauss's ultimate confrontation of Plato and Nietzsche, then the issues are presented from Nietzsche's perspective. It is possible that Strauss wanted to see how far he could go in making the most powerful case that could be made for Nietzsche as Nietzsche understood himself. It is only in occasional hints that one sees a critique of Nietzsche. This does not warrant taking literally every statement in the exposition of Nietzsche as Strauss's own final opinion. Lampert's view that the "Note" was intended to provide "a relentless pursuit comparing Nietzsche

and Plato on all major issues” (p. 116) seems exaggerated at best; that comparison requires an examination of all of Strauss’s other writings that discuss Nietzsche and Plato.

Lampert quotes Momigliano’s remark that Strauss was an “addict of esotericism” but the remark seems oddly appropriate to Lampert; he can’t get enough. Intoxicated with the idea of esotericism, his use of the notion, with reference to Nietzsche and Strauss, seems to lack precision or hermeneutic discipline. As Lampert himself admits, the theme of esotericism is “so entertaining in its intricacies, so intoxicating in its audacity that it threatens to overwhelm more basic matters” (p. 125). And that is exactly what has happened here. While Lampert does offer some insightful comments on the “Note,” some of his readings of particular passages seem so arbitrary and willful that one is reminded of the textual “commentary” on the poem in Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*.

Lampert enthusiastically embraces the notion of esoteric writing and credits Nietzsche as well as Strauss with its rediscovery. But because he understands the issue primarily in terms of the desire of philosophers to “rule” or as a battle for power between religion and philosophy, he is continually conflates the esotericism of the philosophers—undertaken to protect both philosophy and society—with “pious fraud” perpetrated for the sake of gaining or keeping power. (And cf. BGE 105 where the moral indignation about “pious fraud” that Lampert exhibits is seen a limitation of a certain type of “free spirit,” its unfreedom from certain prejudices. Does Lampert believe that Nietzsche’s future spiritual rulers will never use fraud?)

Lampert never tires of claiming that for Nietzsche esotericism is no longer necessary and that he sought to expose its subterfuges while Strauss, being more cautious, still believed in the necessity of esotericism (e.g. pp. 20–21, 167–68, 172–73). But the contrast may be too simple. Strauss, for his part, struggles with the question of whether or not to expose, for example, the esoteric teaching of Maimonides. As a character in Jean Bodin’s *Colloquium Heptaplomeris* remarked: “Maimonides begged the reader not to reveal his secrets.” Strauss concludes that the current historical situation—an age dominated by historical consciousness and facing many dangers to freedom of thought—warrants the partial exposure of his secrets (*Persecution and the Art of Writing*, pp. 55–56). Public discussion of esotericism may also be necessary to counteract the ruling dogma that the mind is incapable of liberating itself from its age (*Natural Right and History*, p. 199 n.43). At the same time he points to the possibility of an esoteric commentary on an esoteric text (*Persecution*, p. 56). If Nietzsche fully grasped esotericism in Strauss’s sense—and it is far from clear that he did—he may have thought that modern man had become so shallow, mediocre, tame, and enervated that any risk was worth taking.

Did Nietzsche understand esotericism in the way that Strauss did? And did he read Plato in the way that Strauss did? Lampert’s answer is yes on both counts. There are a number of discussions of the esoteric-exoteric distinction in

Beyond Good and Evil and also some mentions of it in other writings. But because Nietzsche does not provide any detailed examples of such interpretations it is difficult to judge his meaning. The issue of the adequacy of Nietzsche's interpretation of Plato is a difficult one but a few remarks are possible here.

1. According to Lampert's reading one may be led to wonder, whether, in the language of Plato's *Sophist*, the triad Plato-Nietzsche-Strauss are really one, two, or three. Lampert seems to think that if you can show that both Nietzsche and Strauss argued that Plato did not really "believe" in the Theory of Ideas then you have gone most of the way toward eliminating any real theoretical difference among the three of them (p. 48, n.15, pp. 127, 163–64). Strauss certainly questioned the received textbook version of the Platonic Ideas as *substantiae separatae*; he regarded it as probable that Plato was already familiar with all of the Aristotelian criticisms of the Ideas and accepted them (Letter to Kojève, *On Tyranny*, pp. 277ff.) which does not mean that he did not think that the Socratic way of beginning from "what is" questions is superior to other starting points of inquiry, including Nietzsche's "genealogical" approach.

2. Lampert seizes on a few passages, such as *Will to Power* (428–end), to show that "Plato wanted to have *taught* as absolute truth what he himself did not regard as even conditionally true: namely the separate existence and immortality of souls." This statement (which on this point seems to agree with Farabi's interpretation of the *Phaedo*) might seem to show Nietzsche moving in his last unpublished notes toward something like Strauss's view of esotericism. But it would take a massive effort to explain all of Nietzsche's comments on Plato and Socrates—he distinguished the two—as they appear, for example, in *Beyond Good and Evil* and in *Twilight of the Idols* as compatible with Strauss's interpretation of Plato or the Platonic Socrates. Lampert comes nowhere near such an undertaking. He frequently quotes Nietzsche's remark that "I am a complete skeptic about Plato" to establish the similarity of Strauss's and Nietzsche's readings of Plato (pp. 20–21, 30, 69, 164), but examining the context of that remark in *Twilight of the Idols* would, in fact, tend to support the opposite view ("What I owe to the Ancients" 2).

3. An important passage for the thesis that Lampert advocates is *Daybreak* 496, where it is suggested that Plato intended to do for the Greeks what Mohammed did for the Arabs: "to determine customs in things great and small and especially to regulate everyone's daytoday mode of life." It is here that Nietzsche may see some affinity with his philosopher of the future who will be a spiritual ruler and legislator. But surprisingly there is no detailed discussion of Plato's *Laws*, according to Strauss Plato's only real "political" work. Lampert claims that the goal of Platonic political philosophy is to undertake a massive change in the opinions of society at large. We can scarcely discuss this thesis here. I will only say that in presenting Plato as a great founder or lawgiver, like Mohammed or the Hindu lawgiver Manu (*Will to Power* 142–43), Nietzsche

(and Lampert) implicitly follow the Machiavellian view of “unarmed founders” and their need to revolutionize the opinions of society through “propaganda” (*Thoughts on Machiavelli*, p. 173). According to Strauss, this understanding of “unarmed founders” was based on attempt to imitate the success of Christianity as Machiavelli understood it and is explicitly in opposition to the views of Plato and ancient philosophy. Or is this too an “exoteric” argument?

Indeed, according to Lampert’s reading one is led to ask whether there are any major philosophical differences or issues at all. All that is really necessary is to show that a number of thinkers were really atheists or used esotericism; everything else is inconsequential. Apparently, Plato, Aristophanes, Maimonides, Farabi, Nietzsche, and Strauss are all saying almost the same thing, and any apparent differences are simply due to a difference in reticence or outspokenness. It would appear that any difference between Strauss and Nietzsche comes down to a difference in political tactics and courage in which Strauss is to be faulted for a lack of political nerve (p. 184). Philosophy is constituted not by arguments or fundamental problems but by esoteric whispering—at least until Nietzsche came along to show that it was no longer necessary.

Lampert’s work illustrates the danger of simply focusing on the fact of esotericism—which I don’t deny—without focusing on the *content* of the supposed esoteric teaching and its rational grounds or defensibility. Without this, philosophy as “esoteric” would be indistinguishable from any other secret cult such as ancient mystery religions, Rosicrucianism, or the Masonic order. As Leibniz remarked, esotericism is permissible but it must hide something worth trying to discover in the first place (*Nouveaux Essais*, book 3, chapter 10, section 12).

NATURE, HISTORICISM, AND MODERNITY

1. One of the major themes in Strauss’s “Note” is the transitional character of the relation between the “free minds” and the “philosophers of the future.” In his discussions of historicism Strauss emphasizes the difficulties generated by historicism’s attempt to account for itself as a coherent philosophical view. There is a certain affinity between Nietzsche’s views and those of Marx, as Strauss suggests by two significant references to Marx in his “Note”; both understand themselves as being at the “absolute moment” in history, understood not as the end or peak of history but as the historical turning point (*Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, pp. 32–33). Thus the “free minds” characterized by virtues such as probity and the historical sense will have different virtues and different tasks than the “philosophers of the future” whose way they are preparing. If Nietzsche turns to “nature” in the second half of *Beyond Good and Evil* it is nature in a new and paradoxical sense; Nietzsche’s “nature” is turned to not as an origin but as a goal or task of the philosopher of the future. It is

introduced to overcome the paradoxes of the will to power. Thus Strauss emphasized the transition in section 188 from “nature” (in quotation marks) to nature with the quotation marks silently dropped. The “renaturing” of man is a project of the will that arises from the impossibility of “living according to nature” in the sense of the Stoics (BGE 9).

By simply denying that Nietzsche was in any sense an historicist, Lampert misses the point that Nietzsche must dialectically pass through historicism in order to try to overcome it. He misses the questionable, paradoxical status of Nietzsche's “naturalism” which is entirely different from, say, Spinoza's. It appears that Lampert tends to understand the term “historicism” primarily either as Hegelian or rational historicism (p. 105) or as a historical relativism that reduces the thinker to a sociological exponent of his time (p. 89). But Nietzsche rejected both of these positions.

2. This leads to the larger question of the place of Nietzsche in Strauss's overall interpretation of the evolving dialectic of modernity. By denying that Nietzsche was a historicist, Lampert also claims that Nietzsche denied the fundamental premises of modern philosophy and thus cannot be regarded, strictly speaking, as a “modern” at all. According to Lampert:

Strauss makes it apparent that Nietzsche, “the most modern of the moderns” (KGW VII 2 {201}, is not a modern. Nietzsche “abhorred the modern ideas” (WPP 172). When Strauss defined those ideas in his “Restatement on Xenophon's *Hiero*, he assigned modernity two defining beliefs: “unlimited progress in the “conquest of nature”, which is made possible by modern science, “and the popularization or diffusion of philosophic or scientific knowledge” (OT 178). Nietzsche advocated neither the conquest of nature nor the Enlightenment.” (P. 117)

But if we look at the passage that Lampert cites from *What is Political Philosophy* (p. 172) we see no such argument. Strauss points out the close affinity between Nietzsche's conception of will to power and the early modern philosophy of Bacon, Hobbes, and Locke in which the notion of power is central, a connection that is not always evident owing to Nietzsche's anti-British prejudices (BGE 252–53). As Strauss notes, “Was not the ‘will to power’ so appealing precisely because its true ancestry was ignored? Only Nietzsche's successors restored the connection, which he had blurred, between the will to power and technology. But that connection is clearly visible in the origins of that philosophical tradition which Nietzsche continued or completed: the British tradition.” The connection between Nietzsche and Hobbes is also evident in the important aphorism 9 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, cited six times in Strauss's “Note,” more frequently than any other aphorism. Nietzsche's argument about the impossibility of living according to nature is not unrelated to Hobbes's conception of the state of nature as the *summum malum*.⁶ Nietzsche does not simply use nature as a “negative” standard (“the gruesome rule of nonsense and chance”), however, he also advocates a “return to nature” as a goal or project

(*Twilight of the Idols*, “*Skirmishes of an Untimely man*” 48). The context of the remark in *Twilight of the Idols* makes clear that he has Goethe in mind as a prime example. Nietzsche’s return to “nature” is not nature in the first sense but nature that has already been “spiritualized” by the will to power.

To be sure, Nietzsche’s conception of will to power as a perpetual process of self-overcoming departs to some extent from the conception of power of the early moderns. One reason is that Nietzsche thought the early moderns were not rigorous enough in their antiteleology; they still retained a residual teleology in the notion of self-preservation as it appears, for example, in Spinoza’s concept of *conatus* (BGE 13; *Gay Science* 349). Strauss recognized that Nietzsche used the term “will to power” in a “very subtle and noble manner, yet the crude and ignoble way in which it was later understood is not altogether independent of the change of orientation he suggested” (*Rebirth*, p. 240). Lampert in this matter as in many others has a tendency to understand both Strauss’s and Nietzsche’s statements in an overly refined “spiritualized” sense that may be too abstract and remote from the political realities that Nietzsche and Strauss were all too aware of.

Thus he surprisingly fails to see that “putting an end to the rule of non-sense and chance” (BGE 203) is a descendent of the Machiavellian and Baconian project of mastering fortune and chance applied to the historical process itself. As Strauss notes in paragraph 25 of the “Note”:

the new philosophers must . . . put an end to the gruesome rule of nonsense and chance which was hitherto regarded as “history”: the true history—as distinguished from the mere pre-history, to use a Marxian distinction—requires the subjugation of chance, of nature (*Genealogy II. n 2*) by men of the highest spirituality, of the greatest reason. The subjugation of nature depends then decisively on men who possess a certain nature.

The “Marxian distinction” here refers to a conception of history as at a turning point (in Marx’s case the transition from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom); in this particular context it has nothing to do with Marx’s egalitarianism, as he states (p. 77). Clearly, Lampert is so enthralled by Nietzsche’s “elitism,” the claim that there are those superior by “nature” and hence entitled to rule, that he misses the problematic character of both Nietzsche’s “nature” and of his “ruling.” Thus his call for a Nietzschean politics misses what is ultimately shown to be the astonishing requirement of that politics; not the abjuring of the conquest of nature and human nature through “elimination of its supreme forms” (p. 77) but its transcendence by the *deliberate* and conscious *reintroduction* of contingency, pain, suffering and inequality into human existence in order to avoid the debilitating consequences of modernity: “Hitherto suffering and inequality have been taken for granted, as “given” as imposed on man. Henceforth they must be willed” (“Note” par. 35).

Lampert's own prejudices may also have prevented him from seeing the connection suggested by Strauss between the notion of will to power and the larger project of the conquest of chance embodied in modern science and technology. Indeed, Lampert adamantly denies that there could be any possible connection between Nietzsche's will to power and modern technology and finds Heidegger's claims on this point a "ridiculous notion" (p. 76), perhaps because he wrongly associates technology with his dreaded egalitarianism. This is all the more surprising, given Lampert's attempt to link Nietzsche and Bacon in his earlier book *Nietzsche and Modern Times*. An example of this can be seen in Lampert's concluding remarks on Nietzsche's thought as regards modern natural science and the "conquest of nature" (p. 170), where he quotes the *Genealogy of Morals* III, section 9, regarding modern "hubris" as it would have appeared to the Greeks: "our whole attitude toward nature, the way we violate her with the aid of machines and the ever so heedless inventiveness of our engineers and technicians, is hubris. . . ." Lampert comments: "Physics, the science of physis or nature, was reformable into a philological science of subtle interpretation of nature (BGE 22); its end was not technological mastery of nature, but its understanding of nature and the human place in nature" (p. 170). But is this compatible with the view that all interpretations and understandings are not "disinterested" but are phenomena of the will to power?

Whatever Nietzsche's (and Lampert's) aesthetic distaste for machines and engineers, the passage from *Genealogy* III.9 when read in context does not condemn modern hubris but tries to show how it has come about as a radical reversal or revaluation of everything that was formerly sacred, as did philosophy itself: "all good things were formerly bad things." As it would have appeared to the ancients, "our entire modern way of life, insofar as it is not weakness but power and consciousness of power has the appearance of sheer hubris and godlessness. . . ."

3. Consider paragraph 29 of Strauss's "Note." At this stage of the argument Strauss remarks that:

History takes the place of nature as a consequence of the fact that that the natural—e.g. the natural gifts which enable a man to become a philosopher—is no longer understood as a given but as the acquisition of former generations. (aph. 213); cf. *Dawn of Morning* aph. 540). Historicism is the child of the peculiarly modern tendency to understand everything in terms of its genesis, of its human production; nature furnishes only the worthless materials in themselves. (Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* II sect. 43).

The Locke quotation at this stage in the argument must be compared with the Aristotle quotation in paragraph 33 where nature is understood as telos or completed peak. Like Rousseau, Nietzsche tries to combine aspects of both conceptions of nature while transforming the meaning of both. Lampert claims that the quotations make it clear that "Nietzsche is far from this view of human

production. Nietzsche is no child of Locke” (p. 90). But is there not a connection between Locke’s view of raw nature transformed by human labor and Nietzsche’s view of chaos transformed by the will to power? Furthermore, did not Lampert himself earlier endorse Nietzsche’s procedure whereby “the search for the essence of a thing, its idea [is] replaced by the Nietzschean search: . . . the history or genealogy of a thing” (p. 48)? Later, Lampert describes Nietzsche’s primary method as “genealogy” or “natural history” but fails to see the connection with historicism.⁷ The argument in BGE 213 is marred by Nietzsche’s embrace of nineteenth-century genetics at its crudest, but the essential point: “many generations must have labored to prepare the origin of the philosopher” shows the dependence of philosophical insight on a historical process that has preceded the philosopher.⁸

PROBITY AND DOGMATISM

Nietzsche wrote: “There is a point in every philosophy when the philosopher’s conviction appears on the stage—or to use the language of an ancient mystery: “*Advendavit Asinus, pulcher et fortissimus*” (BGE 8). Lampert’s donkey makes its entrance on page 184 with his reference to “the idiocies of revealed religion” whose opposition to philosophy Strauss understood so well.

Earlier, Lampert quotes the passage from *Natural Right and History* (pp. 74–75) which describes the most fundamental human alternatives as “human guidance or divine revelation” and the impossibility of synthesizing them. But Lampert immediately interprets the issue not as a philosophical problem but as “Which will rule?” (p. 32). By interpreting what Strauss posed as the fundamental question simply as a political power struggle, Lampert ignores the point that there might be a theoretical issue or problem as to whether or not philosophy can give an intelligible, complete account of the whole and thereby have a reasonable or nondogmatic ground from which to dismiss religion as superfluous. Perhaps, as Nietzsche claimed, thinkers like Kant and Hegel who wrestled with just this issue were just philosophical underlaborers (BGE 211).

Lampert exalts the Nietzschean virtue of probity or rigorous intellectual honesty, what Nietzsche called “the youngest virtue.” An example of this modern probity might be seen in Descartes’ methodological resolution to regard whatever is doubtful as false. But as Leibniz remarked, this procedure would not eliminate prejudices but merely change them.⁹ Nietzsche himself saw probity as a virtue of the “free minds” and as such only a virtue during the period of transition to the “philosophers of the future.” While Lampert concedes this at times, he does not seem to appreciate its full significance. As Strauss argues, this modern probity is itself questionable as resting on an act of will unless the will to power is fact and not simply a hypothesis (*Liberalism Ancient and Modern*, pp. 256–57): But on the hypothesis of the will to power there are no facts

but only interpretations (*Will to Power* 438). Strauss points to the “problematic, tempting, hypothetical character of his proposition” of which Nietzsche was well aware. Nietzsche “seems to have hesitated” before putting it forward.¹⁰ It is that ambiguity or hesitation that seems to be missing in Lampert’s enthusiastic paean to Nietzsche.

NOTES

1. “Correspondence of Karl Löwith and Leo Strauss,” trans. George Elliot Tucker, *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 4 (1983):107.

2. Victor Gourevitch, “Philosophy and Politics,” *Review of Metaphysics* 22 (1968).

3. References to aphorisms in Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil* are abbreviated as BGE. Strauss’s “Note on the Plan of Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*” (hereafter referred to as “Note”) originally appeared in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). I have made use of the paragraph numberings provided with the text of the “Note” reprinted in Laurence Lampert’s *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche*, pp. 188–205.

4. “On the Intention of Rousseau,” in *Hobbes and Rousseau*, ed. Maurice Cranston and R. S. Peters (Garden City: Anchor, 1972), pp. 269–70.

5. “What Nietzsche says in regard to political action is much more indefinite and vague than what Marx says. In a sense, all political use of Nietzsche is a perversion of his teaching. Nevertheless, what he said was read by political men and inspired them. He is as little responsible for fascism as Rousseau is responsible for Jacobinism. This means, however, that he is as much responsible for fascism as Rousseau is for Jacobinism.” “The Three Waves of Modernity,” in *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, Hilail Gildin, ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), p. 98.

6. A Hobbesian theme is also evident in Nietzsche’s *Daybreak* in the duality of fear and power. Peter Gast, who was with Nietzsche much of the time the book was being written, noted that “Nietzsche was . . . in this book primarily concerned with two psychological problems: first the problem of *fear* . . . secondly the problem of *power*” (quoted in Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Anti-Christ*, 4th ed. [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974], p. 188, n.5).

7. Consider also Nietzsche’s depreciation of the quest for “origins” as metaphysical: “—*In the beginning*—To glorify the origin—that is the metaphysical afterthought that breaks out when we meditate on history and makes us believe that what stands at the beginning of all things is also what is most valuable and essential.” *Human, All too Human II, The Wanderer and His Shadow* 3. Cf. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, pp. 96–97.

8. Despite Nietzsche’s sometimes crude and distasteful remarks about genetics, inheritance, and “breeding,” found throughout the second half of BGE, his genetics are ultimately “Lamarckian” rather than Mendelian. This has implications for Nietzsche’s whole argument about nature: if acquired characteristics can be inherited, then human will and history can ultimately transform human nature.

9. “Critical Remarks Concerning Descartes’ Principles,” section 2, in *Monadology and Other Philosophical Essays*, ed. Paul and Anne Martin Schrecker (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965).

10. “But does this not imply that the truth has finally been discovered—the truth about all possible principles of thought and action? Nietzsche seems to hesitate between admitting this and presenting his understanding of the truth as his project or interpretation.” “Three Waves of Modernity,” p. 96.

Laurence Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996). ix + 186 pages, \$22.50.

CHARLES E. BUTTERWORTH

University of Maryland, College Park

This painstaking and masterful analysis of Leo Strauss's "Note on the Plan of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*" is informed by deep familiarity with Nietzsche's whole corpus and an admirable grasp of Strauss's myriad writings. Lampert, persuaded Strauss was both quietly and indirectly close to Nietzsche in viewing the will to power as a "fundamental fact" and the eternal return as the "highest value," endeavors to explain why the two might be in such agreement and what it means for Strauss's larger teaching. Of all the recent books and articles on Leo Strauss's purported Nietzschean proclivity, this is by far the most thoughtful and philosophically challenging. It is so not least because Lampert has taken the trouble to examine these other works—as well as the criticisms they have earned from defenders of Strauss—and is able to assess their respective merits in a dispassionate manner. For all these reasons, Lampert's book deserves to be read very carefully, preferably hand in hand with Leo Strauss's article (which Lambert faithfully reproduces in an appendix) and Friedrich Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*. The task is made easier by the intelligent way this book is presented: footnotes at the bottom of the pages are used to discuss points not relevant to the discussion within the text, while basic works are referred to within the main text by means of abbreviations.

The work begins with a painstaking account of how Strauss came to appreciate Nietzsche's importance as a philosopher and a sober, accurate account of the pedagogical considerations that seem to have prompted Strauss's opaque style of writing—which Lampert eschews as he does his "best to dot all the i's" on the grounds that "we're entering the Nietzschean Age," that is, that "public decency does not depend upon our hushing it up that God is dead or that philosophy corrupts" (p. 15). It ends with three thoughtful, well-researched chapters, the first two of which probe the place of Nietzsche and then that of Strauss in the history of political philosophy seen from a Platonic perspective, while the third examines Nietzsche's attack on the modern enlightenment and suggests how it coincides with Strauss's own dour appreciation of that movement. The core of the book, in content as well as form, is Lampert's paragraph-by-paragraph, even sentence-by-sentence and almost word-by-word, analysis and interpretation of Strauss's seventeen page "Note." Indeed, this chapter comprises 92 of the work's 186 expository pages.

To be grasped fully only through a detailed exegesis of Lampert's com-

mentary, Chapter 2 emphasizes the way Strauss compares Plato and Nietzsche in his article and seeks to grasp the extent to which the latter replaces the former. For Lampert, Strauss's enigmatic final sentence, "*die vornehme Natur ersetzt die göttliche Natur,*" provides the key to his ultimate stance. In Chapter 4, he pursues the theme by investigating how Strauss viewed the three different enlightenments—that is, the modern (which leads to all our current problems), the medieval (embodied in Maimonides, who learns from Alfarabi, and which offers a solution of sorts to the modern dilemma), and the classical (embodied in Plato). Here, Lampert indicates how Strauss's philosophical preoccupations are precisely those of Nietzsche and begins to suggest that what links the two, above all, is a common judgment on the evils confronting modernity.

At times, Lampert seems insufficiently attentive to how much Leo Strauss remained a student of philosophy, a scholar, all of his life. That is, rather than propounding a solution to the problems he identified as basic, he struggled to keep the alternatives open for inspection. Lampert makes much of the penultimate paragraph of Strauss's intellectual autobiography (first presented as the preface to the 1965 English edition of *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*) and the repetition there of a phrase from his *Philosophie und Gesetz* of three decades earlier (itself published five years after the Spinoza volume first appeared). In doing so, he neglects how Strauss contrasts there the recourse to faith in which Nietzsche's teaching culminates with the ever-present need to keep the possibility of philosophy open. Lampert is also unduly eager to make an ally of Kenneth Hart Green, as in his reference at page 134, note 6 to Green's *Jew and Philosopher*, page 148: not Strauss's acknowledgement of the 1928 terminus ad quem for his autobiography, but shortcomings in the attempts by Drury, Brague, and others to make a Nietzschean Strauss is the focus of Green's account.

Still, Lampert's observations at the end of Chapter 4 that "Strauss's history of Platonic political philosophy opens a new way to read the history of philosophy, a new way to read our whole spiritual tradition" and "it was Strauss's Plato that enabled him to look differently on Nietzsche than anyone else has" (p. 164) are surely incontrovertible. They prepare the way for the carefully worded conclusion certain to puzzle, if not discomfit, the most thoughtful students of Leo Strauss:

Strauss's service to this possible philosophy of the future was confined to introducing the new Nietzschean divine things from the standpoint of a still skeptical admirer who recognized the arguments in their favor without being persuaded that they could be made persuasive. Having established his character as something of a pious ascetic, Strauss could tell the truth about the new view of things and never be believed except by those very few he had trained to skepticism

about pious masks, his own included. The character he had labored to establish dictated that he tell the truth non-Nietzscheanly, that he introduce the new gods Aristophanically, dressed up as Maimonides, poet of the old order enchanted with these new clouds. (P. 185)

To be appreciated fully, it must be taken together with the three ringing paragraphs that close this proficient, yet sympathetic, inquiry.