The Modern World of Leo Strauss
Author(s): Robert B. Pippin
Source: *Political Theory*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Aug., 1992), pp. 448-472
Published by: Sage Publications, Inc.
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/192187
Accessed: 03/08/2011 22:19

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THE MODERN WORLD OF LEO STRAUSS

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1. MODERNITY IN THE STRAUSSEAN PROJECT

There are a number of very well known controversies associated with Leo Strauss.[1] However, while arguable, it seems fair enough to claim that it is his complex and multifront attack on the insufficiencies of modernity that stands as his most influential legacy in America, both inside and outside the academy. This probably has something to do with the unique importance of the ideas of Enlightenment, religious tolerance, and scientific optimism in American political life, when compared to the more homogeneous societies of Western Europe. The very possibility and fate of an American nation-state is tied deeply to the possibility and fate of Enlightenment modernity, and so Strauss's reflections were bound to find a distinct (and distinctly contentious) audience in the United States.

Moreover, the problem of Strauss's reception has become even more fascinating and confusing in the contemporary American academy. His attacks on the self-satisfaction of post-Enlightenment culture, his doubts about the benefits of technological mastery, about the attempted avoidance of any public reliance on religion, and about the modern confidence in the power of enlightened self-interest in the formation of a polity, all often delivered in a rhetoric sometimes bordering on biblical prophecy, have now suddenly reappeared, in different theoretical garb but just as insistently, on the agendas of neo-Aristoteleans, critical theorists, communitarians, and

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: An earlier version of this article was presented at a conference on German emigrés in America held in Boulder, Colorado in September 1991. That version will appear in a collection of papers from the conference, edited by Peter Graf Kielmansegg and Horst Mewes, and will be part of a series, "Publications of the German Historical Institute, Washington, DC," to be published by Cambridge University Press.

POLITICAL THEORY, Vol. 20 No. 3, August 1992 448-472
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postmodernists. The literature on the newly rediscovered "problem of modernity," Strauss's central, and until recently, quite neglected problem, could now fill several shelves a year and shows no signs of abating. It has also created a different and in many ways more receptive context for Strauss's claims.

However, here I am mostly interested in the philosophical nature of Strauss's basic dissatisfactions with modernity and with the adequacy of his criticisms.

I shall focus attention on his well-known "wave hypothesis," his claim that the modern experiment should be understood as occurring in three waves—a great instauration attributed mainly to Hobbes (though built on ground well prepared by Machiavelli),[2] a first "crisis" correctly diagnosed but not solved by Rousseau, and a second crisis, the continuing "crisis of our times," correctly diagnosed and ruthlessly explored by the thinker arguably more influential for Strauss than anyone other than Plato, Nietzsche. In particular, I want to argue that Strauss's interpretation of the second wave (or first crisis) misinterprets and undervalues the alternatives presented by the German thinkers so influenced by Rousseau, the German Idealists, Kant, Fichte, and Hegel especially. Strauss had a number of reasons for the belief that this tradition must eventually result in a self-undermining historicism, one that intensifies rather than resolves the "modern crisis." I disagree with those reasons and thereby disagree that there is some fatal *aporia* within modernity finally and decisively revealed by Nietzsche.[3]

However, before addressing that specific controversy, I should admit that Strauss's theory of modernity is very difficult to discuss as an isolated theme in his work. Something thus first needs to be said about both the Straussean project as a whole and its complex reception in America.

This reception problem, and because of it, what one might consciously or implicitly bring to any discussion of Leo Strauss, is quite complicated. For opponents, Strauss is everything from a rebarbative crank to a dangerous cult figure, and for many such critics, he raises "the problem of modernity" only because he is an anti- or at least premodern thinker. Among other things, this would mean that he is wedded to a premodern view of natural hierarchy and a kind of religious sense of human finitude and so believes in the permanence of insoluble political problems.[4] Even his followers present him as both a pious natural law absolutist and, on the other extreme, a closet Nietzschean; a sincere enemy of modern relativism or an opponent merely of the openness of the modern discussion of the deeply conventional nature of moral and political life; a moral crusader against modernity or a sophisticated, dissembling zetetic.[5]

In the light of these controversies and this recent reemergence of the modernity problem, I need to begin with a few very general remarks about what Strauss understands by the modernity problem, the question to which his three-wave analysis is the response.

The least controversial claim that one could make is that his modernity critique is everywhere motivated by one great opposition, or *gigantomachia*, the *quarrel between the ancients and the moderns*. The most well known implication of Strauss's understanding of such a fundamental clash, and the origin of by far the greatest scholarly controversy, is his claim about ancient and much of early modern writing. It is esoteric. Great thinkers do not say what they mean when they write publicly; they dissemble or write in a way that will be easily and clearly understood by the many, *hoi polloi*, and they indicate, deftly and most carefully, their true intentions "for those with ears to hear," for the few capable of following the hints and clues.[6]

This strategy is, first of all, prudential. If there were anything like "Straussean-ism" and if it were a religion, its central icon, rivaling the crucified Christ, would be Socrates drinking the hemlock. It is by no means a mere contingency, according to Strauss, that the emergence of the first great philosopher coincided with his condemnation and execution by the city, and virtually everything that Strauss (himself a political and ideological emigré)[7] wrote is in one way or another informed by that event. There is a necessary hostility between "the city," any political unit that must rely on opinion, convention and religion (that is, *any* political unit), and "philosophy," an enterprise devoted to inquiry about the universal and eternal and so inimical to the locally sacred and ancestral. However, this also means for Strauss that the philosopher writes secretly not only to protect himself but as a way of discharging his debt to the city; he knows his own danger and knows how much his leisure accrues a debt to the city, and so he acts beneficently by writing carefully.[8]

This hermeneutical issue already evinces Strauss's fundamental claim, a tragic view of the human predicament: political life, its sacrifices, compromises, and effort, is worthwhile to the extent that it allows and helps promote human perfection, the distinctive, extremely rare excellence of the species, the philosophical life.[9] But no political community could be *based* on such an ideal, no call for sacrifice or effort for the sake of the "few" could ever hope to enlist the support of the "many," who love "their own," especially their own families, and can live together politically only by coming to regard the city as also "their own," itself an extremely difficult task. Although we tend to think of justice as a paradigmatic human good, Strauss often contrasts justice (even if only understood as "doing good to friends as harm to

enemies") with "*the* good," whose possession, if possible, is essentially private. If such claims are coupled with the assertion that such an excellent or even a second or third best regime is wholly a matter of chance, then we should conclude, as he does, that the chief political virtue is moderation; the chief vice, idealism; the central modern folly: the promise that philosophy can play a public role, that by understanding ourselves as we truly are (and by relaying some of these truths to the Prince or, ultimately, by publishing our results, speaking *als Gelehrte*), we will also be able to establish peace, conquer *fortuna*, rationally coordinate the pursuit of private ends in a public realm, and achieve a social order and rule of law held together, defended and reproduced by appeal to reason, or that we shall become, finally, the subjects of history.

Said a different way that will be relevant later, the modern promise could be put in Hegelian terms: it is the promise of *Versöhnung* or a full reconciliation among fellow citizens. The modern demands for legal equality, politically secured self-determination, and a fair distribution of collective resources all involve, when understood as ethical demands, the hope for a full reconciliation among fellow citizens. This will mean that the "realization" of each, whether as rational egoist or as free, self-determining agent, requires and is understood to require the realization of all. There will then thereby be a full reconciliation between all citizens and their social, political, legal, and indeed religious institutions, all regarded as the products of, or at least rationally protected by, their collective, and so mutually reconciled will, and not merely required by chance, necessity, tradition, class power, or circumstance. Essentially, this is also the Christian promise: that there need not be masters and slaves, that, exactly like Christ, each is both master and slave, ruler and ruled, father and son at once. I think it is fair to say that Strauss's attitude toward such claims is the same as Nietzsche's, even if he hides his contempt a bit better than "the anti-Christ."

The "ancient" position by contrast (at least if we adopt Strauss's usual *façon de parler* and abstract from the vast differences among Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and others) is easy to state: no reconciliation.[10] The city or the public world of human affairs is a permanent cave. Even if the philosopher in the *Republic* can be persuaded (perhaps by the force of the argument that he owes the city a debt) or, paradoxically, can persuade the many to compel him to return, it is clear that he must rule in the dark. He cannot bring the outside light in, and it never seems to enter his mind to attempt to bring those inside out (apart from a select few).[11] By remembering the complex, censored education, the control of images, presented in the early books, we can even

surmise that Socrates as ruler assumes the role of chief puppeteer, at least projecting salutary and philosophically informed shadows.[12]

Both positions, when thought through, involve dialectical twists that are important but cannot be explored in this context. That is, the promise of reconciliation in someone like Hegel famously requires and never overcomes (even while it "sublates") the modern experience of "alienation," a great diversity and opposition within civil society, and especially the loss of the natural world and even the family as "home." It involves the promise of a final reconciliation only within institutions produced by human will. For Strauss (and Hannah Arendt, incidentally, both decisively influenced by Heidegger), such a promise of a genuinely modern, "artificial" reconciliation of self with self, others, and world is a disastrous promotion of a self-defining subjectivity, connected with the thoughtless attempt to establish human dominion over the planet and with the apotheosis, not the overcoming, of alienation or loss. It inaugurates what will become apparent in Nietzsche: a complete "measurelessness" for human deeds and a dangerous, vain, finally apolitical (either moralistic or aesthetic) self-absorption. By contrast, Strauss (and again Arendt) regard a genuine recognition of the finitude of "the human things" (or the "human condition"), or an acceptance of the permanently *unreconciled* "natural" condition of human life as itself the realization of *reconciliation*, and so the beginning of a truly humane politics not based on hubris or resentment. As we shall see, many such issues in Strauss devolve from his understanding of Rousseau and so how he understands what for him is everywhere the central issue: the problem of nature in modernity.

These sorts of considerations introduce Strauss's sweeping claim that any form of this modern promise can be fulfilled only in one of two unacceptable and ultimately incoherent ways. A fully mutual, common reconciliation among all citizens might be possible if we drastically "lower" our conception of the ends to be served by political life, if we actually find a lowest common denominator, minimally common to all persons and so a possible goal of rationally coordinated action, and if we treat such a goal as the whole of the political problem. Strauss associates this strategy first with Machiavelli, who rejected the ancient orientation from how men ought to be and took his bearings from how men are, and then, decisively, with Hobbes's "political hedonism,"[13] his beginning with what are in fact the most powerful passions. And he regularly asserts that such a reconciliation based on enlightened self-interest founders on the gang of robbers problem, or that the position must recommend noncooperation and active defection when the risk of

detection is low, and faces insurmountable problems in situations like war or risk of life.[14]

Second, and more elusively, Strauss is aware that a *principled* form of reconciliation, a model for self-ruling rather than ruler-ruled, would be possible if the basis of that reconciliation were the mutual recognition of a common capacity worthy of such universal respect and clearly capable of generating and sustaining such respect, if our mutual claims on and debts to each other were not based on a strategy of self-interest or self-preservation but on the realization that any act of mine (insofar as I am an agent) presupposes a like capacity in all such agents, and so I may not act as if it did not, as if I were a unique exception. Starting with Rousseau, of course, this capacity is "freedom," and a central hope in the modern tradition is that some nonegoistic principle of freedom could be the basis of a universally self-ruling, socially integrated, self-reproducing, or what I am calling a reconciled, political community.

Strauss strongly disagrees. In the first place, he often alludes to many familiar dissatisfactions with this option. Why isn't freedom only one among many competing goods, not at all a "supreme condition" of any other good being a good? How could such a morally rigorous, even absolutist requirement ever serve as a guide to political life? How could such a criterion, which turns out in use to be mainly a criterion of permissible action, a principle that rules out the forbidden and requires the strictly obligatory, ever substantively guide human life or provide a measure for what sort of life is worthwhile or the highest? More generally, he is clearly most worried that any position that links the right with what the will legislates for itself quickly slips down the slippery slope toward legal positivism, historicism, relativism, and finally nihilism.[15]

He realizes, of course, that there is a difference between the beginning of a slope and the end point (that Rousseau and Kant *intend* to be universalists and rationalists), but his general position clearly assumes some sort of strict disjunction: either there is a natural (nonconventional and nonposited) standard for right or there is (ultimately, if not initially) positivism, historicism, nihilism. Early modernity (pre-Rousseau) still preserved such an appeal to nature but at far too low and accommodating a level, one insufficient to sustain any genuine political community. Later modernity is too vulnerable to Nietzsche's challenges, and Heidegger finally represents the "culmination," the "highest self-consciousness" of "modern thought."[16] These latter claims about the "second wave" and its consequences are what I want to explore.

2. *PRELIMINARY PROBLEMS*

There are several ambiguities in what Strauss claims,[17] and all are compounded by a more fundamental difficulty: Strauss's hesitancy to say very much as a political philosopher in the modern, conventional sense. That is, his own account of political philosophy (apart from his historical studies of others' attempts to philosophize about the political things) seems mostly concerned with the political problem of philosophy, or the political issue of a philosophic life, rather than a philosophy of politics.[18]

Moreover, Strauss's account sometimes slips into an indictment of the hubris or folly of the modern founders and so neglects the larger issue of the *motivations* for the modern revolt against antiquity. Any further consideration of that theme would introduce issues rarely mentioned by Strauss: the role of scholastic controversies (especially nominalism and the continuing problem of the Gnostic heresy),[19] the Reformation and the transformation of political notions of right directly linked to Reformation ambiguities about church-state relations,[20] and so forth. Moreover, although Strauss is clearly out to defend the classical notion of natural right, he never does so in his own voice, preferring to write historical studies. These studies sometimes seem to propose logical connections among ideas or necessary deteriorations of positions, which commit Strauss to a complicated historiography only rarely discussed as such and which leave the details of his own views, or his strategy for defending natural right, hidden in asides, allusions, remarks, marginal comments, and so forth.[21]

But there is a deeper issue involved in the way that Strauss presents the ancient-modern contrast, one that will lead us directly to problems with his second wave. That problem has to do with his motivation for presenting the issue as a *quarrel* between the ancients and moderns. Given the obvious deep continuities between the traditions and the difficulties that the "quarrel" characterization raises in understanding the connections between Christianity and modernity, what do we gain by viewing the issue this way?

Partly, Strauss thinks, this gain stems from our own historical situation. He writes that only "men living in an age of intellectual decline" have a sufficiently powerful and ultimately fruitful motive for a devoted reading of old books. In such a situation alone does history "take on philosophical significance." It is a profound dissatisfaction with our own situation that provides us with "good reasons for believing that we can learn something of utmost importance from the thought of the past which we *cannot* learn from our contemporaries."[22]

What is that "thought"? In "Political Philosophy and History," Strauss claims that modern historicism "creates an entirely new situation for political

philosophy," one that raises "the most urgent question for political philosophy."[23] In a remarkable discussion of the "natural obstacles to philosophy" in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Strauss describes this situation with an image and tries to explain why it is novel. Using the classic Platonic image of the cave, Strauss suggests that it is as if people had "dug a deep pit beneath the cave in which they were born" and had withdrawn into that pit:

> If one of the descendants desired to ascend to the light of the sun, he would first have to try to reach the level of the natural cave, and he would have to invent new and most artificial tools unknown and unnecessary to those who dwelt in the natural cave. He would be a fool, he would never see the light of the sun, he would lose the last vestige of the memory of the sun, if he perversely thought that by inventing his new tools he had progressed beyond the ancestral cave dwellers.[24]

That is, our situation is "beneath" the natural obstacles (passion and superstition) described by Spinoza; "it is obvious that that situation does not exist in our time"[25] (where "that situation" is some "natural" experience of the nature of political life and its relation to philosophy). Instead, the "twin sisters" Science and History have conspired to render *impossible* anyone's taking seriously the possibility of a genuine account of "the whole" (and this especially has shaped and forever altered our direct experience of the "things around us.") Our "natural" experience has been thoroughly distorted by an unphilosophic science and a weak competitor: unscientific, ever more "poetic" philosophy. Science still needs some sort of historical narrative to establish its authority, its progressive character, but this history now incoherently replaces rather than introduces philosophy. Thus in a remarkably sweeping conclusion, Strauss asserts,

> *There no longer exists a direct access to the original meaning of philosophy*, as quest for the true and final account of the whole. Once this state has been reached, the original meaning of philosophy is accessible *only* through recollection of what philosophy meant in the past, i.e., for all practical purposes, *only* through the reading of old books.[26]

Our artificial tools are hermeneutical, linguistic, and, ironically, historical; our reward is at least to climb out of our artificial "subcave" and to confront the natural obstacles to (and, presumably, natural opportunities for) philosophy as these were originally understood in classical philosophy. In such old books, we are said to experience what Strauss calls the "natural" understanding of political things,[27] or "the understanding of political things which belongs to political life."[28]

So, if we could recover this "natural" experience of the human things, we could at least understand and presumably perhaps begin to defend the classic

"natural right" doctrine, the claim that there is *by nature* a best life. With such a promise, we are introduced again to that most important and least developed of Strauss's themes, nature.[29] He does not deny that "natural right in its classic form is connected with a teleological view of the universe" at the same time that he freely admits that "the teleological view of the universe, of which the teleological view of man forms a part, would seem to have been destroyed by modern natural science."[30] He admits honestly that "an adequate solution to the problem of natural right cannot be found before this basic problem has been solved."[31] But there is no indication in his writings that he thinks he solves it.

The problems are manifest already in Strauss's use of Plato's very image. In the *Republic*, Plato's depiction of the prephilosophic situation makes very clear that the obstacles to philosophy are *both* natural and artificial. The cave itself is a natural image, representative of our initial, natural ignorance, but that situation is made extraordinarily worse by very ambiguously presented artifices. Someone has chained the prisoners to the ground, preventing them from turning their heads; the light within the cave is wholly artificial, and the images they see on the wall are themselves removed from reality, "shadows of artificial things." These are all presented as such powerful obstacles that it is hard to see why Strauss thinks he needs to add a new, artificial subcave to describe "our situation." The *original* prephilosophic situation seems designed to show how effectively the possibility of philosophy in any sense, let alone some knowledge of "the whole," has been completely suppressed, and suppressed by opinions of various sorts, not necessarily ones derived mainly from "passion or superstition." In fact, interestingly enough, the suppression seems politically motivated, as if to preserve the power of the puppeteers.

The situation is so bad, in fact, that it could be argued that the image presents a serious *aporia*. There is no explanation of how anyone might free himself from such chains (nor even why he would want to, given that he does not know that he is seeing images) but plenty of evidence that even after being freed by others, an ascent to the light would be too frightening and uncertain. Indeed, when considered in terms of the three great images that dominate the middle books of the *Republic*, the cave appears to be in a "metaphysical space" *itself underneath* the possible ascent captured by the divided line. There is no evidence of *eikasia*, the lowest and most important faculty described in the line image, the ability to see images as images. Thus if we "work our way back" to the ancient experience of political life and its relation to philosophy, what we would likely discover is a powerful image of the impossibility of any natural experience of each other, or our own

political situation, obscured and mediated as such experience is by natural ignorance, political power, by the ever present chains of *doxa*, and many other such barriers to our ever coming to know that we don't know.

Of course, it is possible that Strauss may be quite wrong about some historically privileged and natural (rather than merely different, otherwise oriented) experience of "what belongs to political life" and still be right that the classical alternative itself, even if indebted to unique and long lost conventions, is superior. But it is essential to the classical alternative itself, or at least to the critical force of Strauss's position, that we be able in some way to identify the "natural order of things," the situation of the human qua human.[32]

This, above all, is what is so incompatible theoretically with post-Kantian critical philosophy and its political implications. Modern historicism, after all (assuming for the sake of argument that there is such a unified phenomenon), did not originate in the conservative reaction of the German historical school and it does not primarily develop as a consequence of the modern emphasis on the "individual" (eventually the individual national character) so visible in Hobbes and Rousseau. The decisive modern book in philosophy, especially for *that* problem, is not Machiavelli's *Prince* or *Discourses* or Hobbes's *Leviathan* or Locke's *Essay* or Rousseau's *Second Discourse* or even, I would argue, Descartes's *Meditations*.[33] It is Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (again, particularly given Strauss's concerns with Weber, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, with positivism and historicism), and none of Strauss's allusions to the recovery of a "natural" orientation, or of *the* human things, will be of much philosophic interest unless the Kantian attack on the entire rationalist and empiricist tradition, on the dogmatism of the classical notion of nature, is taken account of in philosophic terms.[34] After all, Strauss himself would point out that it is only after Kant that the discussions of "natural" right ends. Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Locke still appeal to nature as a standard, even if of a mechanistic, purposeless, or subhuman nature. (The decisive transitional figure, Rousseau, is a unique case, though it would certainly still be fair to say that his political thought appeals to nature as a kind of standard.) That all becomes in a certain sense "impossible" after Kant. And, at least originally, at the beginning one must take seriously the claim that the Kantian attack on nature is based on a theoretical attack on the very possibility of such appeals and on a complex, "transcendental," nonskeptical alternative.[35]

The Kant problem is especially important because Strauss himself sometimes suggests or at least alludes to a kind of neo-Kantian solution to his own great problem of teleology. That solution involve denying that a teleological understanding of ourselves and of nature is a direct competitor with nonte-

leological accounts, that they are not answers to the same question, and that each question, understood properly within its own domain, is a legitimate one. Strauss himself suggests this solution in language that seems to reflect his debt to Husserl and Heidegger more than to the systematic reflections of Kant or Hegel. He invokes, often incidentally and without elaboration, the indispensability of a teleological perspective in any attempt to understand the "human experience of the human," the natural or lived world *as* it is lived, for us, and as it forms the subject, say, of novels, drama, and poems. A teleological framework is thus the sine qua non of any adequate political reflection on human life, rather than an "object" of study artificially created by a methodology.[36]

However, unless we are willing to accept something like Husserl's methodology, with its suspensions, bracketings, and reductions, such a strategy will still not uncover and would make much more dubious any notion of a distinctive "natural" point of view, only later overlaid with scientific and historicist prejudices. The whole notion of a practical point of view, a life-world, or lived perspective is a descendant of the idealist *denial* that an unmediated appeal to nature or any sort of immediate experience is possible. There may be structural characteristics common to the possibility of such an agent-centered framework, but these are clearly logically formal and compatible with all sorts of content, and there is no non-question-begging way to claim that the content of the classical experience of an ordered, natural hierarchy is original or decisive, even if it is not understood as a theory about objects but as an articulation of an experience and a pretheoretical orientation.[37]

3. THE SUBJECTIVITY PROBLEM

In his essay *Belief and Knowledge*, Hegel emphasizes a common theme in his account of modernity: the modern age is the realization of human freedom, indeed of "absolute freedom." But he also stresses that what makes possible this freedom is the experience of a great and terrifying loss: the experience that "God himself is dead, upon which the religion of recent times rests."[38] However much this loss creates an "infinite grief," "dogmatic philosophies" and "natural religions" "*must* vanish"; there must be a "speculative Good Friday" "in the whole truth and harshness of its Godforsakenness" before the modern "resurrection" can occur.

As we have been seeing, Strauss doubts that the loss which Hegel speaks of, essentially, in his terms, the loss of nature as standard, will be followed by any resurrection. Modernity is better described as a Good Friday with no

Easter Sunday. Again, Strauss fundamentally agrees with this aspect of the Nietzschean critique of modernity. Once the human subject is understood as a self-legislating, even self-defining spontaneity, the German Idealist hopes that such spontaneity would realize itself as "law" or "reason" were doomed. For Strauss, such an unmasking of a self-legislating reason as will to power is reason enough to return to the ancients; for Nietzsche, it is an unmasking of the ancients as well and a situation that demands courage rather than moderation.

However, because Strauss realizes that the sort of "freedom" that Hegel appeals to is not at all a species of the "early modern" liberation of the passions or restriction of the self to self-interest and of reason to calculation, the reasons for his doubts emerge only in his account of the "second" modern wave, the first crisis in modernity. The most self-contained expression of his interpretation of this issue is his account of Rousseau in *Natural Right and History*.

Naturally enough, Strauss concentrates a good deal of his discussion on Rousseauean themes central to Strauss's own project. No writer, after all, has had more to say about the "tensions" between individual and society than Rousseau, and no one wrote in more "glowing terms of the charms and raptures of solitary contemplation."[39] Of course, such contemplation is not philosophy, but the general issues replay the Straussean theme, with civil society "good" only for certain individuals, a type of man who "justifies civil society by transcending it," by "living at its fringes,"[40] even if in Rousseau "his claim to privileged treatment is based on his sensitivity rather than on his wisdom,"[41] and even if, for Strauss, such a criterion finally "lacks any definite human content."[42]

Nevertheless, Rousseau sees for the first time how much had been lost in the first modern wave, especially sees the Faustian bargain, how modern man had sacrificed virtue for ease, and had acquired freedom only freely to traffic in goods and money, to trade, to acquire, to lose himself in idleness. And Rousseau sees the potential hostility, not just the potential practical benefits, in the relation between the requirements of the small, Spartan, virtuous city and science, with its universalism and cosmopolitanism and skepticism. But nevertheless, however much Rousseau was drawn to the "classical view," he always "succumbs to the powers from which he sought to liberate himself"[43] and remains a sort of conscientious objector *within* modernity and not a genuine opponent.

The reason for this goes back to the theme that we have been exploring in Strauss, the problem of nature. Rousseau is justly well known for his doubts about the attempt by Hobbes and other moderns to argue from the natural

human condition. They have not, he claimed, identified the truly natural and appeal instead to contingent features of already socialized man (like pride, suspicion of others, vanity, and even rationality itself). So their attempts to argue from the inherently unstable or self-contradictory situation in the natural state, justifying or requiring the sort of civil society that would resolve this problem, do not succeed. This at once opens up a great ambiguity in Rousseau because it allows him both to appeal to a truly original state of nature as a critical weapon against all society, even as the sheer contingency of civil life makes possible a claim for such a great naturally unrestricted malleability that a far more perfected political situation becomes possible and desirable (i.e., more perfect than what Hobbes or Locke settle for, falsely constrained as they were by their illusions about nature). So Rousseau appeals both "from the modern state to the classical city" and "almost in the same breath" "from the classical city to the 'man of nature,' the prepolitical savage."[44] "He presents to his readers the confusing spectacle of a man who perpetually shifts back and forth between two diametrically opposed positions."[45]

As he develops his picture of this tension, however, Strauss begins to stress only one, more romantic direction in his overall portrait of Rousseau. On one hand, Strauss admits the strain in Rousseau in which, put paradoxically, nature still serves as a criterion for right only by being unavailable. "By thinking through" the appeal to nature, "Rousseau was brought face to face with the necessity of abandoning it completely"[46] and so "showed that man's beginnings lack all human traits," that it was "absurd to go back to the state of nature in order to find in it the norm for man."[47]

But this is hardly a mere negative point; it has historic positive results. It means that "what is characteristically human is not the gift of nature but is the outcome of what man did . . . in order to change or overcome nature." And this very fact itself implies a new wholly modern notion of virtue, one according to which man is good or virtuous only as self-determining, free; that we owe ourselves and others respect only for what we have done or made. Although Strauss hints at his own objections to this doctrine (by implying that it confuses freedom as a condition of virtue with virtue itself[48]) he clearly recognizes that Rousseau is attempting to preserve the notion of public or civil right on a wholly new basis, by appeal, again, to the absence of a usable natural standard and so by appeal to the only conditions under which the human *will* can exercise its distinctive function. This alternate account of the will is a " 'realistic' substitute for the traditional natural law," according to which "the limitation of human desires is affected, not by the ineffectual requirements of man's perfection, but by the recognition in all others of the same right which one claims for one's self."[49]

Such a "substitute" for classical and early modern natural right should also be understood as grounded in the wider implications of Rousseau's still influential suspicions that any appeal to nature often disguises an already socialized, artificial situation. Such doubts wholly transform our notions of ends, desire, reasons, and even the whole structure of practical, intentional activity. One could say that Rousseau was one of the first to realize how deeply even what we feel, what feels immediately and most closely our own, might not be genuinely our own, might itself be the product of the desires of others, or the derivative result of our own desire to be desired by others. Or one might say that he lived in the sort of society for the first time powerful and influential enough to generate these worries. It does not here matter how one puts the issue; the result is the same. No matter how powerfully I feel drawn to an end or goal, how intimately important it seems to me, nothing about such an immediate orientation insures that such a goal is indeed mine and truly expresses me. Only some assurance that *I* have freely determined to pursue such a goal (an assurance, in the tradition that Rousseau founded, provided by some sort of reliance on practical reason) will allow me to count the goal as mine. (This is the original meaning of the Hegelian doctrine of negation: only by losing or "negating" my natural self can I become a genuine self or self-conscious subject. Put another way, in its full Hegelian flourish, the true human "home" is a fully realized "homelessness," although when fully realized, no longer experienced as such.) Given such a worry, the "natural" in all the senses involved by Strauss is "lost," that "god" is dead.

This is not the first time in the history of philosophy that the subject would be portrayed as strange to, or ignorant of, itself, that I could "do the very thing I hate." But for the first time, this dissatisfaction cannot be solved by knowledge of some substantial self, knowledge of what the human soul really is or what it by nature needs. The subject is now an *agent*, a self-determining will, and so a nonalienated form of self-realization will involve securing the conditions under which I can genuinely exercise such agency, wherein my deeds reflect what *I* determine. The politics of perfection has become the politics of self-determination.

But having made all these points and having suggested the direction of this tradition, Strauss chooses to present Rousseau as one still requiring an account of nature. He denies that Rousseau finally conceived of the "law of reason" as independent of the "law of nature," and that he was afraid of a "doctrinairism" were he to do so.[50] While Strauss admits that Rousseau himself "distinguishes true freedom or moral freedom" from "the natural freedom which belongs to the state of nature, that is, a state characterized by the rule of blind appetite and hence by slavery in the moral sense of the term,"

Strauss nevertheless insists that Rousseau "blurs these distinctions." He notes that Rousseau still maintains that in civil society "one obeys only himself and remains as free as before." However, Strauss interprets him to mean not that the citizen or moral agent simply does not lose his freedom, does not become "dependent" in imposing a law on himself. According to Strauss, Rousseau means to claim that man must be free *in the same sense* "as he was in the state of nature." For Strauss, "this means that natural freedom remains the model for civil freedom." (I note that Strauss does not say a postcivil or postsocial freedom.) After having himself reminded us unequivocally that for Rousseau it was "absurd" to find a norm for man in nature, Strauss concludes his discussion of Rousseau by insisting that nevertheless "the state of nature tended to become for Rousseau a positive standard," and "hence Rousseau's answer to the question of a good life takes on this form: the good life consists in the closest approximation to the state of nature which is possible on the level of humanity."[51]

There is, of course, a great deal of truth to this characterization, but it seems to apply much more to *le promeneur solitaire*, a self-conscious and hardly natural refugee from civil society, and not to Rousseau's conception of a self-created political life. Or, it may be true as a statement about the *good* life, but it does not define the *virtuous* life, the only worthy or praiseworthy life possible for us. That is, Rousseau's great worry about civilized life already reflects a moral concern that makes it unlikely that Strauss's final characterization of Rousseau's position, or at least his final emphasis on one of the many aspects of Rousseau's position, could be accurate.

I suspect that Strauss wants to reemphasize Rousseau's romantic sentiments, his clear pessimism about the possibility of a modern, virtuous commonwealth, because Strauss has his own grave reservations that "moral and political ideals" can be established "without reference to man's nature."[52]

These reservations include a number of very familiar charges. First, he clearly thinks that by relying simply on "reason," Rousseau's sweeping reservations about political life invite the famous emptiness and rigorism charges leveled against Kant by Hegel ("To have a reservation against society in the name of the state of nature means to have a reservation against society without either being compelled or able to indicate the way of life or the cause, or the pursuit for the sake of which that reservation is made"[53]).

Second, he believed that the central modern question about the *realization* of a regime based on such principles will now require not an appeal to men's interests and passions but an ultimately mysterious "historical process" or fate, independent of human will, which leads necessarily to Heideggerian fatalism or some form of relativism.

Third, as already indicated, he believes that assigning to politics the task of the protection of "the one natural right," liberty, confuses a necessary condition for the realization of virtue with its sufficient condition. (This is something particularly clear in his debate with Kojève in *On Tyranny*. The achievement of "universal recognition" is an empty historical achievement unless we know *for what*, for what great deed or achievement, individuals are being recognized. To recognize and value them for a *capacity*, without some natural measure for evaluating their use of that capacity, is pointless.[54])

Finally, at other places, as in his discussion of Weber in *Natural Right and History*, he also implies that without a substantial, natural theory of the human good, the appeal to reason will be unmotivated and arbitrary, suggesting some Aristotelian worries about Kantianism again very much in the news.[55]

However, while it is typical of Strauss to show that a certain position or tradition ends in a kind of *aporia* as a way of at least motivating an alternative position, he hardly gives this "replacement" notion of autonomy a run for its money, he nowhere establishes such an *aporia* as such, and, especially, he does not discuss the many reasons *in Rousseau* for resisting a natural standard for civil freedom.

In the *Second Discourse*, for example, where Rousseau introduces us to the calamity of modern civilized life, his chief concern is the problem of independence:

> The savage lives in himself; sociable man, always outside himself, is capable of living only in the opinions of others; and, so to speak, derives the sentiment of his own existence solely from their judgment.[56]

Given such a dependence, we are always

> forever asking of others what we are, without ever daring to ask it of ourselves, in the midst of so much Philosophy, humanity, politeness, and Sublime maxims, we have nothing more than a deceiving and frivolous exterior, honor without virtue, reason without wisdom, and pleasure without happiness.[57]

Thus Rousseau's famous problem, a problem that *cannot* be resolved by "making the state of nature a positive standard." Rousseau is very clear that savage or primitive independence is actually only chance isolation from and ignorance of others, not true independence from them. Further, and most important, no such savage is truly self-determining because he is so ignorant of self. (Each savage may have "considered himself master of everything," but only because of his "weakness and ignorance." In reality, by having no

understanding of others outside their family, "*they did not know themselves.* They had the concept of a father, a son, a brother, but not of a man." They are not dependent, without being truly independent.[58]) On the other hand, what we eventually establish as marks of independence in society – property, prestige, all the other consequences of *amour-propre* – and the self we end up caring so much about, everywhere involve a slavish dependence on the "opinions of others." In society, independence is always fragile and suspicious, and ironically, establishing such independence seems to require acknowledgement by – dependence on – others.

What then will count as the achievement of freedom? As Strauss shows, Rousseau believes that we must *completely* achieve civic virtue for this problem to be resolved.[59] Most famously, this means subjecting ourselves to the "general will," but more complexly, it also means coming to understand ourselves, our individual egos, in a wholly new way, as intimately bound up with the will of all other citizens. The *moi individu* is both the source of the self-serving egoism that generates the anomie, fragmentation and chaos that Rousseau sees as typical of modern political life, and is itself illusory, and that is the key to its overcoming. Once we are socialized, the very sentiment of our own existence, so thoughtlessly esteemed by us, in which we take so much pride, is not ours but depends on others. However, to be dependent on the civic unit or state, on the whole as general will, is not to be dependent on others but, finally and truly, on ourselves.[60] Acting "for ourselves" in the usual sense (egoism) is acting in the service of what others (or brute circumstances) have taught us to want. Only by freely subjecting ourselves to the general will, by identifying ourselves with the general, wholly objective good, not the preserve of any one or group, can we be *self*-determining agents (or at least, only in this way can we *insure* that we are *not* other- or nature-determined.[61])

To be sure, this is only the beginning of the issue. Rousseau is clearly interested in such autonomy because he is also still interested in happiness, in the fullest or sweetest satisfaction of our passions. This all greatly complicates the "Kantian" direction of the preceding remarks and would take us far afield in the present context. Here, I only mean to suggest that the concern with autonomy so prominent in Rousseau, and the necessarily accompanying "unavailability" of any politically relevant appeal to nature, is more thoroughly and consistently motivated in Rousseau than Strauss allows for and generates a far more powerful and influential legacy in later philosophy than the romantic, "natural" sentiments (or classicist nostalgia) pointed to by Strauss.

Let me conclude by pointing to the general line of reasoning inaugurated by Rousseau and, I am claiming, seriously underrepresented in the modernity narrative told by Strauss. The central foundational issue is entwined in complex epistemological and metaphysical issues and is difficult to state simply. Obviously, the sweeping Kantian and post-Kantian attack on the possibility of a rational or a priori account of nature (or "substance") as well as its attack on the sufficiency of any attempt at a radically empirical account set the stage for a drastically altered context for ethical and political thought. Most prominently, such theoretical accounts of the role of an "active" subject in "forming" and "legislating" what could *count* as an appeal to nature or any fact of the matter ended up greatly influencing the way in which the "bindingness" or obligatory character of normative principles was understood. I can be so bound or obliged only *if I bind myself*, freely impose on myself a principle or norm. What I am by nature inclined to do or what might be naturally satisfying or naturally flourishing and so forth will all henceforth count as reasons for action only if they can be reasons *for me*, if I can count them as principles of action, under conditions that insure that I am freely so counting them or self-imposing them.[62]

Such an idealist attack on the possibility of givenness or immediacy or the "natural" as such thus creates the modern post-Rousseauean problem of freedom: in *what* sense can I be said to impose a "law" on myself, all such that I can be assured that *I* am freely legislating in such a way. Already in Rousseau, as we have seen, the problem of freedom is largely the problem of independence, and already such a good is what Kant would call a *supremum bonum*, a condition for any other good. (Nothing could be said to be good for me unless I can recognize it as a good for me and pursue it as such.) And already with him, such independence is crucially linked with rationality. In any case, where I count as a reason to act some contingently produced or socially powerful desire or interest, I am acting in the service of others or the vagaries of nature, not a as a self-determining agent. I can act as a self-determining agent only as a rational agent, only under principles equally applicable to all such agents.

All of this introduces a rich and complicated set of problems, most of which has to do with the sense in which such a notion of freedom can itself be said to be a substantive good (rather than a mere condition for the pursuit of any substantive good) and how the requirement of universality in any possible, genuine, self-legislation (how the necessity of "taking others into account" in such self-legislation) is to be understood. These are controversial, much disputed claims, but I hope to have said enough to indicate that such a

tradition remains an unexplored option in Strauss's account, or a modern "wave" that has not yet peaked or crested, much less crashed and dissipated.

NOTES

1. I mean such things as his theory of esoteric writing, his passionate attack on the political science community, with its "fact-value" distinctions and "historicism," his partisan support for what some take to be an antiegalitarian political agenda, his unusual, "classical" defense of liberal democracy, and his apparent ability to inspire a sectarian consciousness among followers.

2. "TWM" (see later listing), 84. Strauss's works will be cited as follows, using the abbreviations indicated: "A Giving of Accounts," ("AGA"), *The College* 22 (1970): 1-5; *The City and Man* (*CM*) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); "Correspondence Concerning Modernity," ("CCM"), translated by Susanne Klein and George Eliott Tucker, *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 4 (1983): 105-19; *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (*LAM*) (New York: Basic Books, 1968); "On Classical Political Philosophy," ("OCPP") in *WIPP* (see later listing), 78-94; "On Collingwood's Philosophy of History" ("CPH"), *Review of Metaphysics* 5 (1952): 559-86; *On Tyranny* (*OT*), edited by Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (New York: Free Press, 1991); *Natural Right and History* (*NRH*) (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1968); *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (*PAW*) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss* (*RCR*) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (*S*), translated by E. M. Sinclair (New York: Schocken, 1965); *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (*SPP*) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (*TM*) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); "The Three Waves of Modernity" ("TWM"), in *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays by Leo Strauss*, edited by Hilail Gildin (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 91-98; "An Unspoken Prologue to a Public Lecture at St. John's" ("UP"), *The College* 30 (1979): 30-31; *What Is Political Philosophy*? (*WIPP*) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

3. For one thing, such rational will theories, in the work of Rawls, Habermas, Gewirth, prominent Kantian theorists like Onora O'Neill, and in attacks on Strauss like that by Luc Ferry, occupy a far larger area of the political stage than during Strauss's lifetime, and that fact alone suggests a modernist strategy in political thought that at least appears far more resilient, both culturally and philosophically, than Strauss seems to have anticipated.

4. This view of Strauss as an antimodern proponent of ancient thought has persisted, despite Strauss's many warnings against expecting classical "recipes for today's use," his clear admission that modern political thought has produced a kind of society "wholly unknown to the classics," for which "classical principles are not immediately applicable," and his frequent defense of modern liberal democracy. Cf. *LAM*, 4-5, 10, 23, 207-8; *WIPP*, 27-28, 78-87; and *CM* 11. There is, of course, still the ambiguity of that "immediately" in the last quotation. Perhaps it would be more accurate to see Strauss as a tentative supporter of Nietzsche's interpretation of those dissatisfied with modernity: "The main thing about them is *not* that they wish to go 'back,' but that they wish to get *away*. A little *more* strength, flight, courage, and artistic power, and they would want to *rise*, not return!" Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966), sec. 10 at 17.

5. Cf. Thomas Pangle, "Introduction" to *Leo Strauss: Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); the review by Harry Jaffa, "The Legacy of Leo Strauss," *Claremont Review* 3 (1984): 409-13; and their subsequent exchange in vol. 4, 18-24. (Some support for a "Nietzschean" view of Strauss can be found in chap. 2 of *NRH*. Although Strauss, as a matter of style, sometimes slips into the voice of the position discussed, the remarks on page 107 about the "fictitious" nature of the city are striking.)

Shadia Drurie has presented the most extreme Machiavellian/Nietzschean/esoteric reading of Strauss in *The Political Ideas of Leo Strauss* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 29, 36, 170-81, esp. 180. The idea of Strauss's "philosopher" as Nietzschean "superman" "*creating values*, is a calamitous overstatement (it would be hard to think of a word held in greater contempt by Strauss than "values") and it misses a central issue in Strauss's account, the problem of nature, nowhere explored with any sensitivity in Drurie's book. The crude characterization of Strauss as a "consequentialist" does not much help matters either. A more subtle discussion of Strauss's "exotericism" and his relation to Nietzsche can be found in Stanley Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 107-23. See especially his remarks on why the Straussean "hypothesis" is "*an act of will*, and hence a moral matter," at 111, also see 118, 119, 122, 125; "my thesis is that Strauss is himself almost a Nietzschean," at 127; top of 133, where Rosen suggests his own position, a more dialectical relation between pretheoretical intuition and discursive account-giving.

6. I should also note that the reception of Strauss has been greatly confused by the number of people who, given Strauss's deeply sympathetic treatment of ancient and early modern esotericism, think he must be actually encouraging such esotericism and to be somehow promoting a political program that aims at some sort of a restoration of the rule of the few (cf. preceding note 4). See, for example, Stephen Holmes, "Truths for Philosophers Alone?" *Times Literary Supplement* (1-7 December 1989): 1319-25. The paradox of Strauss frequently and openly discussing the supposedly secret "highest things" and also, supposedly, encouraging, in numerous books and articles, that people *not* publish so openly about the "highest things" makes for a bewildering and implausible picture of Strauss's intentions. Especially, as Holmes points out, Strauss was not at all esoteric about his own nonreligious views, even though the modern openness about atheism is supposedly the greatest modern folly on this sort of reading. (Strauss hardly helped "narcotize the masses" by publicly defending religion; nor did he "secretly" counsel gentlemen [p. 1322]. By the ancient standards that he is supposed to be promoting, he would come off as an atheist blabbermouth.) Strauss himself is supposed to have criticized "modern social scientists" for their "indiscretion" in pointing out what Plato also knew, "the irrationality of the masses and the necessity of elites"; all this even though, as Holmes also points out, Strauss had no hesitancy about repeating in his own voice such supposed "indiscretions" time and again (p. 1320). All of which is not to say that Strauss's own contemporary political intentions are anything but deeply ambiguous. But they are at least ambiguous, something often ignored in complaints about his elitism and antiegalitarianism.

7. Cf. Nathan Tarcov's discussion of how the "crisis of the West, of modernity," "was, for Strauss most clearly exemplified by the Jewish problem, which he [Strauss] regarded as 'the most manifest symbol of the human problem insofar as it is a social or political problem'." Tarcov, *Epilogue* to *History of Political Philosophy*, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 909. The quotation is from *S*, at 6.

8. Cf. *CM*, 52.

9. Cf., however, the remark in *CM* that "Socratic conversation" and "Platonic dialogue" are "slightly more akin to comedy than to tragedy" (p. 61). "The philosophical life" should by

no means be confused with what professionals in academic departments do for a living, and its characteristics remained, like many other things, ambiguous in Strauss's work.

10. Cf. Victor Gourevitch, "Philosophy and Politics II," *Review of Metaphysics* 22 (1968), at 296.

11. I am alluding here to recent controversy created by M. F. Burnyeat's review, "Sphinx Without a Secret," *New York Review of Books* 32 (30 May 1985): 30-36. See the exchange in vol. 32 (10 October 1985), "The Studies of Leo Strauss: An Exchange." The problem of the philosopher's return to the cave in book 7 of the *Republic* is the single philosophic issue at stake between Burnyeat and the respondents in Strauss's name. (On the general issue of Strauss's reluctance to engage in the more "technical" aspects of Platonic philosophy, see the apposite remarks by Rosen in *Hermeneutics as Politics*, at 121.) But whether Burnyeat or Strauss is right about the interpretation of that single passage seems to me to miss the larger point. The "unrealizability" of the city described in the *Republic* is a central, explicit theme *in* it. Not only does Socrates make very clear how unlikely its realization is, he goes on to claim that in the unlikely, chance event that it were realized, it is *impossible* that it could survive beyond the first generation. (There is no knowledge of the "marriage number.") So, it is highly unlikely that such a city could be realized and even if realized, *impossible* that it could survive. So in what sense could the *Republic* be an "ideal" to be *imitated*? That is the only question important to Strauss's larger purposes.

12. This is all not because the philosopher "knows things" of great danger to the city. His only knowledge is knowledge of ignorance, and *that* is why he is so dangerous, or far more dangerous than if he represented a determinate set of claims. The radically sceptical, incomplete, or zetetic character of Strauss's version of Socraticism is what promotes a kind of homelessnesss potentially subversive in contexts where steadfast loyalty, faith, and dedication are the required virtues. See the very helpful discussion in Gourevitch, "Philosophy and Politics II," 304-11. Paradoxically, this characterization also undermines somewhat Strauss's claims about "tension" because it suggests what is at least as manifest in Platonic dialogues as is the political problem of Socrates—the political irrelevance of Socrates, his being ignored, mocked, his not having a *techne* and so being an *idiotas*, and his lack of success in influence as well as in arguments.

13. *NRH*, 169. (Machiavelli had been "ancient" enough to recognize the importance of glory in any account of a stable, thriving regime. This drops out in Hobbes and, for Strauss, decisively distinguishes him from Machiavelli.)

14. Clearly, of course, from the modern point of view, sights are raised, not lowered, particularly when the point of comparison is scholasticism and papal or feudal politics. In a phrase: *sapere aude*! See Stanley Rosen, "A Modest Proposal to Rethink Enlightenment," in *The Ancients and the Moderns* (New Haven, CT: Yale University press, 1989), 1-21.

15. *NRH*, 17. I should note here that Strauss only asserts that "the historical school had obscured the fact that particular or historical standards can become authoritative only on the basis of a *universal* principle which imposes an *obligation* on the individual to accept." Depending on what Strauss means by "authorative," such a claim is either a tautology or begs the question at issue. Some principle can be authoritative for me if, in some situation it counts as a reason *for me* to act; to claim otherwise would require a much more serious confrontation with a figure who Strauss (and, as far as I can see, most of his students) neglect: David Hume.

16. *WIPP*, 57. Heidegger is not here mentioned by name, but there is little doubt who Strauss means. For Strauss's comments on his own debts to Heidegger, see *WIPP*, 248, "AGA," 2-3; "UP," 31. See also Pangle's somewhat Heideggerian characterization (or so it seems to me) of the role of "need" (or "care"?) in "shaping" awareness, in "Introduction" to *Leo Strauss*, at 5.

Luc Ferry, in *Political Philosophy I: Rights—The New Quarrel Between the Ancients and the Moderns*, translated by Franklin Philp (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), makes

a *very* great deal out of the relation between Strauss's modernity critique and Heidegger's (see esp. 19, 37), and he criticizes the results of this affinity for Strauss's political thought. Strauss subscribes to "the neoconservative tendency to sacralize natural inequalities." (p. 21). Ferry nowhere addresses the enormous differences between Strauss and Heidegger over the nature of the "pretheoretical orientation" so crucial for Strauss and so underplays Strauss's vigorous attacks on Heidegger's historicism. Moreover, Ferry's criticism, which also takes up the post-Rousseauean or German idealist themes introduced here, is limited by relying on a traditional and, I think, deeply flawed reading of Hegel (as a metaphysical "identity theorist," with a historicist theodicy) and by a reading of Fichte (essentially Philonenko's), which presents an elaborate, idiosyncratic interpretation of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, only to end up attributing to Fichte a Kantian position still vulnerable to many of Hegel's original worries. See my *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), chaps. 1 and 3, and *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), chap. 3.

17. Many of the most puzzling have to do with a central theme in his multifaceted worries about modern secularism and enlightenment, what he calls the Athens-Jerusalem theme, or the competing claims of reason and revelation. Cf. *NRH*, 74, 75, 86; *S*, 30, and Richard Kennington, "Strauss's *Natural Right and History*," *Review of Metaphysics* 25 (1974), at 69.

18. In "OCPP" he contrasts a "provisional" definition of political philosophy, in which philosophy is the manner of treatment, and the political is the subject matter, with a "deeper" meaning, in which, "the adjective 'political' in the expression 'political philosophy' designates not so much a subject matter as a matter of treatment; from this point of view, I say 'political philosophy' means primarily not the philosophic treatment of politics, but the political, or popular, treatment of philosophy, or the political introduction to philosophy – the attempt to lead the qualified citizens, or rather their qualified sons, from the political life to the philosophical life" (pp. 93-94).

19. As in, for example, Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), and Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, translated by Robert Wallace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983). See my "Blumenberg and the Modernity Problem," *Review of Metaphysics* 40 (1987): 535-57.

20. Cf. Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

21. Interestingly enough, as Nathan Tarcov has pointed out, many of these standard criticisms of Strauss were first raised by Strauss himself in a 1946 review of John Wild. This introduces a new level of ambiguity, an ambiguity about how Strauss himself understood these ambiguities in his work. Cf. Nathan Tarcov, "On a Certain Critique of 'Straussianism'," *Review of Politics* (Winter 1991) at 7.

22. *C*, 576, 585 (my emphasis). See also Nathan Tarcov, "Philosophy and History: Tradition and Interpretation in the Work of Leo Strauss," *Polity* 16 (1983), at 24.

23. *WIPP*, 57.

24. *PAW*, 155-56.

25. Ibid., 156.

26. Ibid., 157 (my emphasis). See also "CCM," 106-7, 109, 114, especially the claims about our being "still natural beings with natural understanding" even though "the way of natural understanding has been lost to us."

27. *NRH*, 79.

28. *CM*, 11-12.

29. "Strauss was dedicated to the restoration of a rich and concrete natural consciousness of the political phenomenon," in Allan Bloom, "Leo Strauss: September 20, 1899-October 18, 1973," *Political Theory* (1974): 376; see also page 379 and the reference to Kant. On the general problem of nature in Strauss, Kennington's "Strauss's *Natural Right and History*," is indispensable.

30. *NRH*, 7-8.

31. Ibid., 8. See also "TWM," 85. Strauss's own reliance on teleology is quite limited. His concern is not with teleological *explanation*, and he certainly does not write as if final causes are also efficient. Moreover, he has little to say about a complex natural hierarchy, or chain of being. It is only important to him that in some sense the human kind is not the highest, and that the nature of the human kind provides a "standard" for life, something Strauss most often interprets as a limit, as in "TWM," at 86. This raises interesting questions about his view of philosophy, the most immoderate of activities. Cf. *WIPP*, 32: "For moderation is not a virtue of thought" even though "moderation is a virtue controlling the philosopher's speech." Cf. also Gourevitch, "Philosophy and Politics II," 290-93.

32. Rosen, in *Hermeneutics and Politics*, has rightly suggested that the better Straussean strategy (sometimes followed by Strauss) would be to try to show that the fundamental political problems emerge as the same *in all times*: "Then the Greeks as Greeks become irrelevant" (p. 128). This would still, however, run afoul of the Kantian and post-Kantian objections to the *possibility* of such an identification of our "natural situation." Rosen himself, in his own work, is not concerned with that problem, because he believes that such Kantian objections stem from a project that is itself essentially practical, based on a kind of Nietzschean recommendation to "will" a different world, and so that it is not in a better theoretical position in its critical stance. (Once there is no "natural standard," "all theory is construction" (p. 126). I have the same problems with this "slippery slope" argument (here, in Rosen, from Kant to Nietzsche) as I do with Strauss's Rousseau-to-historicism slide. The ride is so fast that many potential safe stops on the way down are too hastily ignored.

33. See my *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem* and "Hegel, Modernity, and Habermas," *Monist* 74 (1991): 329-57.

34. See the very brief reference in *NRH*, 19-20.

35. I put it this way because it is open to someone sympathetic to Strauss to argue that Kant's own critical attack is motivated by a practical project not finally defensible discursively but only intuitively. See Stanley Rosen's chapter on "Transcendental Ambiguity" in *Hermeneutics as Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 19-49, and my discussion of Kant in chap. 3 of *Modernism*. For a discussion of the "moral foundations of Kant's critical philosophy," see Richard Velkley, *Freedom and the End of Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

36. Perhaps the most well known of such passages is the reference to the "simple experiences regarding right and wrong which are at the bottom of the philosophic contention that there is a natural right" and the surrounding discussion in *NRH*, 31-32; for passages that resonate with Husserl's influence on Strauss's view of the natural attitude, see 78-79. Of the many tensions in *NRH*, none seems to me more puzzling than the contrast between Strauss's claims about such a natural experience on page 24, where the experience of "fundamental problems" is introduced but immediately qualified by the claim "To leave it at this would amount to regarding the case of natural right as hopeless" and qualified by the argument that a philosophic *solution* of these problems must be possible, must be in view, if there is to be a philosophic issue of natural right; and, by contrast, page 32, where "*no more is needed to legitimate philosophy* in its original, Socratic sense" than a grasp of these problems *just as problems* (my emphasis). Cf. Rosen's remarks on Strauss and Husserl in *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 131.

37. An experience can be pretheoretical; but it can be preconceptual or wholly "unmediated" only if one is willing to buy into, say, more of Heidegger's program than Strauss, for other reasons, ought to.

38. G.W.F. Hegel, *Glauben und Wissen*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Rheinisch-Westfaelischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1968ff.) bd. 4, 414; *Faith and Knowledge*, translated by W. Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 191.

39. *NRH*, 291.

40. Ibid., 292-93.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid., 262.

44. Ibid., 254.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., 274.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid., 278.

49. Ibid., 276.

50. Ibid., 277.

51. All quotations are from *NRH*, 282.

52. "TWM," 92.

53. *NRH*, 294. Strauss realizes that Rousseau intends to preserve a distinction between "liberty and license," but he implies throughout these concluding remarks that his theory does not have the resources to sustain that distinction. See also *WIPP* at 53 for his remarks about "horizontal" as opposed to "vertical" limits on liberty.

54. *OT*, 177-212. This issue and many others are discussed in the Gourevitch articles cited earlier, one of the best single discussions of Strauss's project. See also *TM* at 298 on modern philosophy in general, and the discussion by Michael S. Roth, *Knowing and History: Appropriations of Hegel in Twentieth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 125-46.

55. See Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

56. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses, Together with Replies to the Critics, and Essays on the Origin of Languages*, translated and edited by Victor Gourevitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 199.

57. Ibid.

58. Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses*, 261 and 262 (my emphasis).

59. I pass over the tension between the solution proposed in such works as the *Second Discourse* and the *Social Contract* and that suggested by *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* The latter intimate that the former would be, but cannot be, a solution. On the character of Rousseau's utopianism, see Judith Shklar, *Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau's Social Theory* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969). See also David Gauthier's remarks about the "post-social" self in his "Le Promeneur Solitaire: Rousseau and the Emergence of the Post-Social Self," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 8 (1990): 35-58, esp. 55.

60. This is the infamous, paradoxical claim of the *Social Contract*, book I, chap. 7, that such a "giving of each citizen to the country," or the ominous "forcing him to be free," "ensures him against all personal dependence," in *The Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol. 2, edited by C. E. Vaughan (New York: Wiley, 1962), at 36.

61. There is obviously much more to this story, especially with regard to the infamous general will and legislator problems. Strauss clearly shares, say, Hegel's worries that Rousseau cannot effectively distinguish such a general will from the will of all, that the "general will" is "for all practical purposes, the will of the legal majority," in *NRH*, at 286. But Strauss seems also to reject, without much consideration, the attempt by Kant and Fichte to extend what Strauss calls Rousseau's "horizontal" limitation of liberty (*WIPP*, at 53) by insisting that this very appeal (the constraint of the will of others) itself represents a "vertical" *ideal*, a genuine "kingdom of ends."

62. Holmes is thus correct that Strauss's "true enemy is Kant, whom he therefore delicately side-steps in print," in "Truths for Philosophers Alone?" at 1324. But this is not because Strauss was simply committed to antiegalitarianism. As I have tried to show, it has much more to do with how Strauss understood the *basis* of the demand for political equality in thinkers like Kant. This issue goes to the heart of his leading idea, the idea of nature, and its basic limitations in any analysis of our current predicament.

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