Interpretation
A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Spring 1993
Volume 20 Number 3

227
Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā al-Rāzī
*The Book of the Philosophic Life*
*Translated by*
Charles E. Butterworth

237
Charles E. Butterworth
*The Origins of al-Rāzī’s Political Philosophy*

259
Grant B. Mindle
*Shakespeare’s Demonic Prince*

275
Morton J. Frisch
*Shakespeare’s Richard III and the Soul of the Tyrant*

285
Richard Sherlock & Roger Barrus
*The Problem of Religion in Liberalism*

309
Kenneth C. Blanchard, Jr.
*Ethnicity and the Problem of Equality*
Interpretation

Editor-in-Chief
Hilail Gildin, Dept. of Philosophy, Queens College

Executive Editor
Leonard Grey

General Editors
Seth G. Benardete • Charles E. Butterworth • Hilail Gildin • Robert Horwitz (d. 1987) • Howard B. White (d. 1974)

Consulting Editors
Christopher Bruell • Joseph Cropsey • Ernest L. Fortin • John Hallowell (d. 1992) • Harry V. Jaffa • David Lowenthal • Muhsin Mahdi • Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr. • Arnaldo Momigliano (d. 1987) • Michael Oakeshott (d. 1990) • Ellis Sandoz • Leo Strauss (d. 1973) • Kenneth W. Thompson

European Editors
Terence E. Marshall • Heinrich Meier

Editors
Wayne Ambler • Maurice Auerbach • Fred Baumann • Michael Blaustein • Mark Blitz • Patrick Coby • Edward J. Erler • Maureen Feder-Marcus • Joseph E. Goldberg • Stephen Harvey • Pamela K. Jensen • Ken Masugi • Grant B. Mindle • James W. Morris • Will Morrissey • Aryeh L. Motzkyn • Charles T. Rubin • Leslie G. Rubin • Bradford P. Wilson • Hossein Ziai • Michael Zuckert • Catherine Zuckert

Manuscript Editor
Lucia B. Prochnow

Subscriptions
Subscription rates per volume (3 issues):
- individuals $25
- libraries and all other institutions $40
- students (four-year limit) $16

Single copies available.

Postage outside U.S.: Canada $4.50 extra;
elsewhere $5.40 extra by surface mail (8 weeks or longer) or $11.00 by air.

Payments: in U.S. dollars and payable by a financial institution located within the U.S.A. (or the U.S. Postal Service).

CONTRIBUTORS should follow The Chicago Manual of Style, 13th ed. or manuals based on it; double-space their manuscripts; place references in the text, in endnotes or follow current journal style in printing references. Words from languages not based on Latin should be transliterated to English. To ensure impartial judgment of their manuscripts, contributors should omit mention of their other work; put, on the title page only, their name, any affiliation desired, address with postal/zip code in full, and telephone. Please send THREE clear copies. Contributors using computers should, if possible, provide a character count of the entire manuscript.

Composition by Eastern Composition, Inc., Binghamton, N.Y. 13905
Printed and bound by Wickersham Printing Co., Lancaster, PA 17603

Inquiries: Patricia D’Allura, Assistant to the Editor, INTERPRETATION, Queens College, Flushing, N.Y. 11367-0904, U.S.A. (718)520-7099
[I. INTRODUCTION]

1. Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā al-Rāzī, may God join gladness and repose to his spirit, said: When people of speculation, discernment, and attainment saw that we were engaging with people and becoming involved with the means of making a living, they criticized us and found fault with us claiming that we were turning away from the life of philosophers, especially the life led by our leader, Socrates. Of him it is related that he did not call upon kings but made light of them when they called upon him, did not eat pleasant food, did not wear fine clothing, did not build, did not acquire, did not beget, did not eat flesh, did not drink wine, and did not attend festivities. Instead, he confined himself to eating vegetables, wrapping himself in a ragged garment, and lodging in a cask in the desert. Moreover, he did not practice dissimulation either with the common people or with those in authority. Instead, he confronted them with what was truth according to him in the most explicit and clearest utterances. We, however, are the opposite of that.

2. Then they said, among the evils of this life that our leader Socrates led is that it goes against the course of nature and provision for cultivation and begetting and leads to the ruination of the world and the perdition of people and their destruction.

3. We shall respond to them concerning whatever of that is in us, God willing.

[II. THE PHILOSOPHIC LIFE]

[A. The Reasons for Socrates' Earlier Life]

4. Thus, we say that they speak the truth in what they relate and mention about Socrates. That was part of him. However, they ignore other things and
refrain from mentioning them so intent are they on forcing a proof against us. That is, these matters they relate about Socrates did pertain to him at the very outset and for a long period of his life. Then he turned away from many of them so that he died having had daughters, fought the enemy, attended sessions of festivities, eaten good things except for flesh, and drunk a little intoxicating beverage. That is known and related among those who are concerned about inquiring into the reports about this man.

5. Indeed, he was the way [100] he was at the very outset because of his great amazement over philosophy, his love for it, his desire to devote to it the time otherwise dedicated to passions and pleasures, his nature being inclined to it rather than to that, and his making light of and looking down on those who did not view philosophy in the way it deserves and who preferred what was baser than it. Without a doubt, at the start of stirring and ardent matters, one prefers turning to them, being excessive in loving them and pursuing them, and hating those opposed to them until, when he penetrates them deeply and the matters become firmly settled in him, the excessiveness about them declines and he returns to moderation. As it is said in the adage: “there is a pleasure to every new thing.” So this was the condition of Socrates during that period of his life. And what was related of him with respect to these matters is more widespread and numerous because they are more curious, astonishing, and remote than the conditions of people. People are enamored about spreading the curious, unusual report and shunning the familiar and habitual.

6. We are not, therefore, opposed to the praiseworthy aspect of Socrates’ life, even though we fall short of him greatly and acknowledge our deficiency in practicing the just life, suppressing desires, loving knowledge, and aspiring to it. Our difference with Socrates, then, is not about quality of life but about quantity. We are not inferior if we acknowledge our failing with respect to him, for that is the truth; and acknowledging the truth is more noble and virtuous. So this is what we say about this topic.

[B. Austerity Versus Profligacy]

7. With respect to what they criticize in [the first of] Socrates’ two lives, we say: what is truly blameworthy there also is the quantity, not the quality. For it is clear, as we have explained in our book On Spiritual Medicine, that abandoning oneself to passions and preferring them is not most virtuous and most noble. Rather, it is taking each need to the extent that is indispensable or to the extent that does not bring about a pain that surpasses the pleasure thereby obtained.

8. And Socrates did turn back from what was excessive in it, that which is truly blameworthy and leads to the ruination of the world and the perdition of people, for he did come back and beget, war against [101] the enemy, and
attend sessions of festivities. Anyone who does that leaves off rushing into the ruination of this world and perdition of the people. It is not necessary that not to be like that is to be mired in the passions. And we, even if we do not deserve the name of philosophy in comparison to Socrates, surely deserve its name in comparison to nonphilosophic people.

[C. Principles of the Philosphic Life]

9. Since this has come forth with respect to the issue, let us complete the argument about the philosophic life so that the lovers of knowledge and those who prefer it may profit from it. So we say: we need to support the matter concerning the goal we are intent upon in this treatise on fundamentals whose explanation has been set forth in other books that are to be consulted to make easier what is in this treatise. Among them are our book On Divine Science, our book On Spiritual Medicine, our book On Blaming Those Characterized as Philosophers Who Occupy Themselves with What Is Superfluous in Geometry, and our book characterized as The Glory of the Art of Alchemy, but above all our book characterized as The Spiritual Medicine. Indeed, it is indispensable for bringing to completion the goal of this treatise and the fundamentals upon which we build the branches of the philosophic life—which we take here and set forth in an abridged form. They are:

i. We will have a praiseworthy or blameworthy state after death according to our life during the time our souls are in our bodies.

ii. The most virtuous matter for which we were created and towards which we are moved is not getting bodily pleasures, but the acquisition of knowledge and the practice of justice; through these two comes about our deliverance from this world of ours to the world in which there is neither death nor pain.

iii. Nature and desire call us to prefer present pleasure, whereas intellect frequently calls us to leave present pleasures aside for matters that are to be preferred.

iv. Our Master, from whom we hope for reward and fear punishment, looking over us and having compassion for us, does not want us to cause pain; detesting injustice and ignorance on our part, He loves for us to be knowledgeable and just; indeed, this [102] Master punishes the one among us who causes pain and who deserves to be pained according to what he deserves.

v. We ought not to endure a pain in the hope of getting a pleasure that the pain itself surpasses in quantity and quality.

vi. The Creator, may He be magnified and glorified, has bestowed upon us the particular things of which we have need, like tilling, weaving, and similar things of which the world and subsistence are constituted.

10. Let them [i.e., these principles] be accorded us, then, so that we may build upon them.
11. So we say: if the pleasures and pains of this world are interrupted when life is interrupted whereas the pleasures of the world in which there is no death are always uninterrupted and unlimited, he is deceived who would purchase a transitory, interrupted, limited pleasure for one that is eternal, lasting, uninterrupted, and unlimited. Since the matter is such, it follows necessarily that we ought not to seek a pleasure which to acquire we will undoubtedly perpetrate something that prevents us from deliverance to the world of the soul or that forces upon us in this world a pain that is greater and more severe in quantity and quality than the pleasure we prefer. Any pleasures apart from that are permitted to us.

12. The philosophic man may, however, leave aside many of these permitted pleasures in order to condition and habituate his soul so that—as we have mentioned in the Book of the Spiritual Medicine—it will be more comfortable and easier for him in case of necessity. For habit, as the ancients mention, is second nature making the hard easy and the strange familiar—either with respect to matters of the soul or bodily matters. As we see that couriers are stronger at walking, soldiers bolder at war, and so on, there is no obscurity about habits facilitating matters that were difficult and hard before habituation.

13. Even though this argument—I mean, what we have mentioned about the extent of restricted pleasure—is abbreviated and summary, many particular matters are subsumed under it—as we have explained in the Book of the Spiritual Medicine. [103] For if the fundamental we have set down—namely, that the intelligent man ought not to yield to a pleasure when he fears it will entail a pain surpassing the pain he acquires in putting up with forsaking pleasure and stifling passion—is sound and true in itself or is so postulated, then it necessarily follows that: even if we were in such a condition as to possess the whole earth for the length of our life by perpetrating upon people what does not please God, such that we would be prevented by Him from acquiring eternal good and abiding grace, we ought not to do or prefer it. Again, if we were sure or almost sure that by eating something like a plate of fresh dates we would get an ophthalmia for ten days, we ought not to prefer eating them. This is the case with respect to the particular instances falling between the two examples we have mentioned, despite the one being great and the other petty in relation. Each of the particular instances is petty in relation to the greater and big in relation to the more petty. Because of the multitude of particular instances falling under this general rule, it is not possible to make the argument exhaustive.

14. Since what we wanted to explain has been explained with respect to this topic, we are intent upon explaining another one of our goals that follows upon this goal.
[E. About Pain]

15. So we say: from the fundamental we have set down to the effect that our Lord and Master is concerned about us, looks over us, and has compassion for us it follows also that He detests pain befalling us. Any pain befalling us that is not by our enterprise or choices but pertains to nature is thus due to a necessity and occurred inevitably. It results therefrom that we ought not to cause pain to any sensible being unless it deserves such pain or unless by means of that pain we spare the creature a more intense one. [104] Under this maxim, as well, there fall many details: all the sorts of wrongs, the pleasure kings take in hunting animals, and the excess to which people go in exerting tame animals when they use them. Now all of that must be according to an intelligent and just intent, rule, method, and doctrine—one that is not exceeded nor deviated from.

16. Pain occurs when one hopes to push away a greater one by means of it, as when the surgeon lances [an abcess]; cauterizes a gangrenous limb; and makes [the sick person] drink bitter, repugnant medication and forego pleasant food from fear of great, painful sicknesses. Again, tame animals are to be exerted with [considerate] intent and without violence, except in instances when necessity calls for violence and reason and justice requires it—as in spurring a horse in seeking to save oneself from the enemy. For justice then requires spurring and injuring if it is hoped thereby to save a human being, especially if he is a good, learned man or one of great value in a way that confers well-being on most people. For the value of such a man and his remaining in this world is better for his people than the horse remaining. Again, when two men happen to be in a waterless desert and one of the men has enough water that he is able to save himself but not his companion, in such a case the one of the two who confers more well-being to the people is to be preferred. So this is the analogy for these and similar kinds of cases.

17. Hunting, pursuing, exterminating, and annihilating ought to be engaged in with respect to animals that lead a complete life only by means of flesh—such as lions, tigers, wolves, and the like—as well as with those which cause major harm without there being any hope of profiting from them or need to use them—like vipers, scorpions, and so on. So this is the analogy for these kinds of cases.

18. It is permissible to destroy these animals only from two perspectives. One is that when they are not destroyed, they destroy many animals. [105] This is a feature particularly characteristic of these animals, I mean those that live only by flesh. The other [perspective] is that souls are delivered from the bodies of no animals except for the body of human beings. Since this is the case, the delivering of souls like these from their bodies is like a bringing along and facilitating to [ultimate] deliverance.

19. Since both perspectives apply to those that live only by flesh, they must
be exterminated so far as possible. Indeed, that brings about a lessening of animals being pained and a hope that their souls will enter into more suitable bodies. Vipers, scorpions, wasps, and so on have in common that they cause pain to animals and are not suitable to be used by man the way tame animals are used and put to work. Therefore it is permissible to annihilate and exterminate them.

20. Animals that are put to work and that live from grass must not be exterminated and annihilated. Rather, they are to be worked gently as we have mentioned and, as much as possible, used sparingly for food and bred sparingly lest they become so numerous that it is necessary to slaughter them in great numbers. That, however, is to be done with intent and according to need. Were it not that there is no hope of a soul in any but a human body being delivered, the judgment of reason would not give rein to their being slaughtered at all. Now those who engage in philosophy have disagreed about this matter. Some of them are of the opinion that man is to nourish himself by means of flesh, and others are not of that opinion. Socrates was among those who did not permit it.

21. The judgment of intellect and justice being that man is not to cause pain to others, it follows that he is not to cause pain to himself either. Many matters forbidden by the judgment of intellect also come under this maxim, such as what the Hindus do in approaching God by burning their bodies and throwing them upon sharp pieces of iron and such as the Manicheans cutting off their testicles when they desire sexual intercourse, emaciating themselves through hunger and thirst, and soiling themselves by abstaining from water or using urine in place of it. Also entering into this classification, though far inferior, is what Christians do [106] in pursuing monastic life and withdrawing to hermitages as well as many Muslims staying permanently in mosques, renouncing earnings, and restricting themselves to a modicum of repugnant food and to irritating and coarse clothing. Indeed, all of that is an iniquity towards themselves and causes them pain that does not push away a preponderant pain.

22. And Socrates had led a life like this in his early years, but he renounced it in later years as we mentioned before. There is a great diversity among people with respect to this classification not to be gone into here. Yet it is unavoidable that we say something approximating it by way of illustration.

[F. Upper and Lower Limits]

23. Thus we say: people differ with respect to their conditions. Some are raised in comfort and others in misery. Desires make a greater demand upon the souls of some—as with those who are enamored of women, wine, love of rule, and matters such as that with respect to which great diversity occurs among people. Thus the pain that befalls them in suppressing their desires differs greatly in accordance with the difference in their conditions. The skin of
one born of kings and brought up in their comfort will not endure coarse clothing nor will his stomach tolerate repugnant food in the way the one born of common people will. Rather, he will be severely pained from that. Similarly, those accustomed to having a certain kind of pleasure will be pained when prevented from having it; and the inconvenience will be multiplied for them and be more extensive and sharper than for one not accustomed to that pleasure.

24. Because of that it is not possible to charge everyone in the same way; rather, it is to differ in accordance with the difference in their conditions. Thus, the philosophically minded children of kings are not charged with adhering to the food, drink, and other staples of life that the children of the common people are charged with unless it is done gradually when necessity calls for it.

25. However, the limit it is not possible to go beyond is that they abstain from anything pleasant that can be attained only [107] by perpetrating iniquity and murder and, in general, from everything that antagonizes God and must not be done according to the judgment of intellect and justice. What is apart from that is allowed them. So this is the upper limit, I mean, with respect to giving oneself over to enjoyment.

26. The lower limit—I mean, with respect to being ascetic and restricting oneself—is for a human being to eat what does not harm him or make him sick and not to reach beyond to what excessively pleases him or what he desires so that he becomes intent upon pleasure and desire rather than upon satisfying his hunger. And for him to wear what his skin endures without suffering and not to have a propensity for sumptuous, colorful clothing. And for him to dwell in what shelters him from excessive heat and cold and not to reach beyond to magnificent, splendid, colorfully adorned, and highly decorated dwellings unless he have such an abundance of wealth that it is possible for him to extend it to such matters without iniquity, transgression, or self-exertion in acquisition. Therefore those born of poor fathers and brought up in shabby circumstances excel in this instance. For restricting oneself and being ascetic is easier for those like this, just as it was easier for Socrates than for Plato to restrict himself and be ascetic.

27. What falls between these two limits is allowed. The one who practices that does not go outside of the title of philosopher; rather, it is permissible for him to be so entitled. Nonetheless, it is preferable to have a propensity for the lower limit more than for the higher limit. Virtuous souls, even if they are companions to bodies raised in comfort, gradually bring their bodies towards the lower limit.

28. Yet to go beyond the lower limit is to go outside of philosophy, somewhat in the way we have mentioned with respect to the conditions of the Hindus, Manicheans, monks, and hermits. It is to go outside the just life and to antagonize God, may He be exalted, by causing pain to souls needlessly and warrants [108] being placed outside the title of philosophy. The situation is similar with respect to going beyond the higher limit. We beseech God—the
Endower of intellect, the Dispeller of grief, and the Remover of anxiety—to give us success, direct us, and assist us in doing what is most favorable to Him and in bringing us closest to Him.

[**G. The Philosophic Life in Sum**]

29. **In sum, I say:** Since the Creator, may He be glorified and magnified, is a knower who is not ignorant and a doer of justice who does no injustice; and since He is unqualified knowledge, justice, and compassion; and since He is a creator and master to us, whereas we are slaves and vassals to Him; and since the slaves most beloved of their owners are those who most adhere to their ways of life and are most in accordance with their traditions; the slaves closest to God, may He be magnified and glorified, are those who are most learned, most just, most compassionate, and most kindly. This whole speech is what is meant by the statement of all philosophers: "Philosophy is making oneself similar to God, may He be glorified and magnified, to the extent possible for a human being." And this is the sum of the philosophic life. A detailed statement of it is what is in the *Book of the Spiritual Medicine*. For there we have mentioned how to rid the soul of bad moral habits and the extent to which someone aspiring to be philosophic ought to concern himself with gaining a livelihood, acquisition, expenditure, and seeking ranks of rulership.

[**III. SELF-JUSTIFICATION**]

30. Since we have explained what we wanted to explain with respect to this topic, we will return and explain what pertains to us. And we will mention those who defame us and will mention that even until this day we have not lived a life—due to success granted by God and to His assistance—such that we deserve to be excluded from being designated "philosopher." That is because the one who deserves to have the title of philosophy stripped from him is the one who falls short in both parts of philosophy—I mean, knowledge and practice—through ignorance of what the philosopher is supposed to know or leading a life the philosopher is not supposed to lead. Yet we—due to God's praise, grace, granted success, and guidance—are free from any of that.

31. Now with respect to the classification of knowledge, if we had only the power to compose a book like this, that would prevent us from having the title of philosophy stripped away. In addition, there are our books like *On Demonstration, On Divine Science, [109] On Spiritual Medicine*, and our book *On an Introduction to Physical Science*, which is designated as *Lecture on Nature*. And there are our treatises² like *On Time, Place, Matter, Eternity, and Vacuum, On the Form of the World, On the Reason for the Earth Arising in the Middle of the [Heavenly] Sphere, On the Reason the [Heavenly] Sphere Has*
Circular Movement, and our treatises\textsuperscript{3} On Composition and On Body Having Its Own Motion and This Motion Being Known. And there are our books pertaining to the soul, our books pertaining to matter, and our books about medicine like The Mansûri Book, our Book to Those Whom the Physician Does not Visit, our Book about Existing Drugs, the one designated as Royal Medicine, and the book designated as The Summary. With respect to the latter, none of the people of the kingdom has surpassed me nor has anyone yet followed along in my steps or copied me. And there are our books about the art of wisdom, which is alchemy according to the common people. In sum, up to the moment of my doing this treatise, nearly two hundred books, treatises, and pamphlets have issued forth from me in the physical and metaphysical branches of philosophy.

32. With respect to mathematics, I acknowledge that I have looked into them only to the extent that was indispensable for me. That I have not consumed my time in trying to master them is deliberate on my part and not due to an incapacity for them. For those who so wish, I have set forth my excuses to the effect that what I have done is correct and not what those designated as philosophers do who consume their lives busying themselves with the details of geometry.

33. If what I have reached with respect to knowledge is not what is reached by the one deserving to be called a philosopher, then I would like to know who such a one would be in this epoch of ours.

34. Now with respect to the practical part, I have not in my life—due to God's assistance and granting of success—reached beyond the two limits that I defined. Nor has there appeared anything from my actions such that it deserves to be said that my life is not a philosophic life. For I have not kept company with the ruler as a bearer of arms or as one entrusted with his affairs. Rather, I have kept company with him as one engaged in medicine and a convive having free rein over two matters: when he was sick, to cure him [110] and to improve the condition of his body; and when his body was healthy, to entertain him and to advise him—God knows that of me—about everything I hoped would be of sound benefit for him and for his flock.

35. It has not appeared that I have an avidity for amassing money and spending it nor for disputing with people, quarreling with them, or being iniquitous to them. Rather it is known that I am the opposite of all that and have an aversion to claiming many of my rights.

36. With respect to the way I eat, drink, and engage in festivities, those who have frequently observed me in such activities surely know that I do not reach any point of excess. It is the same with the rest of what can be observed of my conduct with respect to clothing, mounts, and male and female servants.

37. With respect to my love of knowledge, my avid desire for it, and my striving for it, it is known among those who have been my companions and have observed me that from the time of my youth until this moment I have never ceased being eagerly devoted to it. It is such that should I chance upon a book I have not read or a man I have not sounded out, I do not pay attention to
any concern whatever—even if that is of major harm to me—until I have gone through the book and learned what the man is about. My patience and striving are such that in a single year I have written, in a script like that used on amulets, more than twenty thousand pages. In working on the large *Summary*, I spent fifteen years working night and day so weakening my eyesight and ruining the muscles in my hand that at this moment I am prevented from reading and writing. Though my situation is thus, I exert myself as much as I can not to abandon them and always have recourse to someone to read and write for me.

[IV. CONCLUSION]

38. Thus if according to these people the extent of my practice with respect to these matters brings me down from the rank of philosophy and the goal of following the philosophic life according to them is other than what we have described, then let them set it before us either in clear speech or in writing. Thus we may accept it from them, if they bring forth a superior knowledge; or we may refute them if we establish that there is a mistake or deficiency in it.

39. Let me, out of indulgence towards them, grant that I fall short with respect to the practical part. Still, what can they possibly say with respect to the theoretical part? If they have [111] found me to be deficient with respect to it, let them tell me what they have to say about that so that we may look into it and afterwards concede that they are right or refute their error. And if they have not found me to be deficient with respect to the theoretical part, the most appropriate thing is for them to take advantage of my knowledge and not to pay attention to my life. Then they will be doing something like what the poet says:

Put into practice my learning,
For if I fall short in my doing,
To your advantage is my learning,
And of no harm my short falling.

40. This is what I wanted to set down in this treatise. To the Endower of intellect, praises without end—as He deserves and merits. And may God bless His chosen male servants and His good female servants.

41. *The Book of the Philosophic Life* is completed. To God, may He be exalted, praise in every circumstance, always, perpetually, and eternally.

NOTES

1. The text has the singular: *mithl kitābinā*.
2. The text has the singular: *wa <mithl> maqālatinā*.
3. See preceding note.
The Origins of al-Rāzī’s Political Philosophy

CHARLES E. BUTTERWORTH
University of Maryland

I. INTRODUCTION

We begin our inquiry into the origins of al-Rāzī’s political philosophy with his Book of the Philosphic Life (Kitāb al-Sīrah al-Falsafīyyah) not because it provides the fullest statement or is in any sense his earliest writing, but because it is most readily accessible. The questions raised in this treatise are central to his fuller teaching and are more clearly stated in this work than in his other writings. Here he seeks to justify the way he has led his life by showing how closely it parallels that of his acknowledged master, Socrates. For al-Rāzī, as for Socrates, the problem is to what extent the philosophically inclined individual must engage in, and be concerned with, the world of human beings as opposed to the world of ideas.

That, of course, is not the whole question. In defending his own conduct by comparison to that of Socrates, al-Rāzī must also counter the unspoken suspicion that the pursuit of philosophy threatens the faith of the community. His success at fully exculpating himself from this silent charge without ever addressing it explicitly is a clear sign of how adroitly al-Rāzī has crafted the treatise. As will become clear in what follows, he accomplishes this feat by enlarging the sphere of philosophy, by taking it beyond the way it is conventionally viewed—that is, as a quasi-ethical, quasi-metaphysical pursuit. And this, again, is part of the appeal the treatise has for us.

Whereas Socrates had to contend with the ridicule heaped upon him and his endeavors by so gifted a comic poet as Aristophanes, al-Rāzī has to answer the slanders of nameless contemporaries. For Socrates, the charges of Aristophanes awakened and then nurtured suspicions in the breasts of his fellow Athenians. Apparently never quite able to lay those suspicions to rest, he even contributed to them by the dismal account he gave of himself at his trial, at least if we are to believe Plato’s and Xenophon’s accounts. But both of these thinkers defended Socrates’ memory in other writings:

One can easily receive the impression that Plato and Xenophon presented their Socrates in conscious contradiction to Aristophanes’ presentation. It is . . . difficult to say whether the profound differences between the Aristophanean Socrates and
the Platonic-Xenophontic Socrates must not be traced to a profound change in Socrates himself: to his conversion from a youthful contempt for the political or moral things, for the human things or human beings, to a mature concern with them. The clearest and most thoughtful exposition of this possibility known to me is to be found in Muhammad b. Zakariyya al-Razi’s The Philosophic Way of Life.¹

Because of the impassioned manner in which al-Rāzī—defending himself—speaks of Socrates and his change from something like solitary asceticism to involvement with human beings and political matters, we turn to his exposition with enthusiasm. In this writing, al-Rāzī pleads eloquently for the pursuit of philosophy and does so without ever losing sight of how fellow Muslims disdain such activity.² The answer he gives to their charges leads us to the threshold of political philosophy and to its basic concerns. To make these observations clearer and somewhat more persuasive, I would like to analyze the basic argument of the Book of the Philosophic Life and examine the way it adumbrates al-Rāzī’s broader political teaching.

II. THE ARGUMENT OF THE TEXT

The Book of the Philosophic Life may be divided into four major parts: an introduction, a digression in which al-Rāzī sets forth the basic characteristics of the philosophic life, an attempt at self-justification, and a conclusion. By far the shortest parts of the work are the introduction and the conclusion, each amounting to less than a page of printed text (paras. 1–3, 99:3–13 and paras. 38–40, 110:16–111:7).³ Even his attempt at justifying himself is quite short and amounts to little more than two pages (paras. 30–37, 108:13–110:15). So by far the most extensive and detailed part of the book is that presented explicitly as a digression, namely, the account al-Rāzī gives of the philosophic life.

A. The Introduction (paras. 1–3, 99:2–13)

The work opens with al-Rāzī noting that people of speculation, discernment, and attainment have criticized him for turning away from the life of philosophers—especially the life led by his leader, master, or imam, Socrates. He is blamed for engaging with people and involving himself with the means of making a living, whereas the philosophical life as lived by Socrates consists in refraining from activities that lead to contact with others—especially the rich and powerful—and in showing little concern for his personal comfort (para. 1, 99:3–5 and see para. 34, 109:19–110:2). Central to the list of nine activities from which Socrates is said to have refrained (99:5–7) is his refusal to acquire anything, a refusal that finds a symbolic parallel in the central place his wrapping himself in a ragged garment occupies among the enumeration of activities
in which he did engage (99:7–9). This pairing takes precedence over the more apposite linking of Socrates’ refusal to wear fine clothing—the third example of things he shunned—and his recourse to a ragged garment. It should also be noted that the negative list begins and ends with references to Socrates’ antisocial behavior, whereas the positive list refers to such conduct only at the end. Surrounding the mention in the negative list that he “did not acquire” are examples of how he shunned acquisition—that is, by not building and not begetting. Only his lack of concern with food and drink is cited equally often. From these two lists, then, it appears that Socrates’ disinterest in acquisition and in bodily comforts attracted most attention. Indeed, in contrast to the nine references to his clothing habits, various instances of his failure to acquire, and lack of appetite with respect to food and drink, there are only three indications of his disinterest in contact with other humans.

Now the enumeration of all these negative and positive activities is based on what is related of Socrates (al-ma\'thir <\'anhu> annahu, [99:5]),\(^4\) that is, on what is generally believed about him. Breaking its fine rhetorical balance is the intriguing additional claim al-Rāżi sets forth about Socrates—one so worded that it can only be understood as referring back to the earlier enumeration of what is related (see 99:5)—to the effect that he never practiced dissimulation (taqiyyah) either with the common people or with those in authority. Instead, “he confronted them with what was truth according to him” (bal yajbahuhum bi-mā huwa al-ḥaqq ‘indahu) and did so “in the most explicit and clearest utterances” (bi-ashraḥ al-alfāẓ wa aбыаниhäuser [see 99:9–10]). It is, nonetheless, a claim developed nowhere in the treatise. Al-Rāżi lets Socrates’ reluctance to dissimulate pass in silence either because, unlike us, he does not know that Socrates was anything but nondissimulatory—that he was ironic above all else—or because he is overly impressed by Socrates’ death and thinks that had he not been so forthcoming with the people of Athens he might have survived.\(^5\) A more interesting line of thought is that al-Rāżi does know about Socratic dissimulation and is thus practicing something of the same here by merely repeating the characterization without either defending Socrates for it or depicting it as an inappropriate practice.

Not content to blame al-Rāżi for his worldly pursuits, these same critics go on to insist that the life led by Socrates is evil insofar as it (a) goes against the course of nature as well as against cultivating and begetting and (b) leads to the ruination of the world as well as to the destruction of the human race. As presented here, then, the issue is whether the philosophic life Socrates is reputed to have led—a solitary, austere life that ignores his own as well as other people’s needs—is good. Al-Rāżi, who claims to follow Socrates, is by no means solitary or austere. And even though the critics blame the self-imposed isolation and abstemiousness of Socrates, they fault al-Rāżi for failing to lead such a life. At the very least, the critics are not consistent.

Nothing permits us to explain the inconsistency as arising from two sets of
critics. The text presents the two critiques as coming from the same individuals. Al-Rāzī merely adds—clearly referring back to the “people of speculation, discernment, and attainment” whom he had first mentioned as having criticized and found fault with him—“then they said” (thumma qālū). What is more, this characterization of them as “people of speculation, discernment, and attainment” is not particularly flattering. Apart from acknowledging that they have discernment, it is purely descriptive: it tells us what they do and what they have achieved, nothing more. Even the gracious inclination to their ability to distinguish becomes an empty gesture once the full set of recriminations is presented.

At any rate, al-Rāzī says nothing about this inconsistency in what follows. He concentrates instead on defending Socrates’ solitary austerity as merely a zealous excess of youth. Since Socrates abandoned it early on, al-Rāzī sees no need to investigate whether a life so devoted to the pursuit of wisdom that it ignores all other concerns is laudable, nay, is the good life, or whether the good life is the balanced one he describes as his own at the end of the treatise. Still the issue cannot be ignored, for it points to the broader question of whether the pursuit of philosophy must be so single-minded that it takes no account of the needs of men or, differently stated, whether the proper focus of philosophy is nature and the universe or human things.

B. The Philosphic Life, A Digression of Sorts
(Paras. 4–29, 99:14–108:12)

This long part or section consists of seven subsections. In the first two, al-Rāzī seeks to justify Socrates’ life by showing that the solitary and austere portrait just presented is not accurate insofar as Socrates turned away from those practices later in life (paras. 4–6, 99:14–100:14) and by arguing that austerity or abstemiousness is better than profligacy (paras. 7–8, 100:15–101:4). In the three intermediate subsections, al-Rāzī provides what he terms the complete argument about the philosophic life grounded in six principles taken from other works (paras. 9–10, 101:5–102:5), then illustrates what he means by explaining two of the principles in detail—namely, the fifth one concerning pleasure (paras. 11–14, 102:6–103:13) and the fourth one to the effect that we should not cause pain (paras. 15–22, 103:14–106:6). In the last two subsections of this “digression,” al-Rāzī notes that even though the diversity among the conditions of human beings necessitates the relative character of his discussion thus far, a general rule of upper and lower limits can still be stated (paras. 23–28, 106:7–108:3); and he provides a summary definition of the philosophic life (para. 29, 108:4–12).

1. (Paras. 4–6) It was Socrates’ “great amazement over philosophy” (shid-dat ‘ajabih bi-al-falsafah) that occasioned his earlier solitary austerity, accord-
ing to al-Rāzī (para. 5, 100:1). Other reasons for these practices of Socrates derive from his love for philosophy, “desire to devote to it the time otherwise dedicated to passions and pleasures,” being inclined to it by nature, and “making light of and looking down on those who did not view philosophy in the way” he thought it deserved and “who preferred what was baser than it.” All of these led him to the kind of excessive attitude that frequently befalls people when they first become desirous of something; they come back to a balanced approach once they have penetrated it deeply. In sum, Socrates was infatuated with philosophy as a youth, but returned to a more conventional way of life as he came to understand philosophy better. Though al-Rāzī does not emphasize it as much as we might wish, all of these causes seem to come back to a single one—Socrates’ uncompromising pursuit of philosophy, a pursuit so intently focused that it seems almost erotic. The one passing reference he does make to “stirring and ardent matters” is sufficient reminder. After all, Socrates is known for characterizing himself as erotic about his pursuit of wisdom.6

More attention is paid to this earlier conduct of his—that is, it is more a part of common opinion and rumor—because such conduct is so unfamiliar and astonishing to most people. Indeed, observes al-Rāzī, people like to talk about the unusual. This settled, al-Rāzī now denies that his own conduct differs from that of Socrates, “even though we fall short of him greatly and acknowledge our deficiency in practicing the just life, suppressing desires, loving knowledge, and aspiring to it” (para. 6, 100:10–12). Thus, al-Rāzī’s first defense of himself is that “our difference with Socrates . . . is not about quality of life but about quantity” (100:12–13).

The wording permits al-Rāzī to compare himself, albeit unfavorably, with what is praiseworthy in Socrates’ life and to avoid being precise about whether this praiseworthy element is related to the first or second period of his life. Ostensibly, he need not blame that solitary austerity because Socrates turned away from it in order to follow a more balanced life. Thus, however blameworthy such conduct might be in itself, Socrates pursued it neither long enough nor intensely enough to deserve blame. Al-Rāzī refrains from blaming Socrates for his solitary austere practices, then, because they did not lead to dire consequences. He sees no reason to blame such withdrawal or such austerity simply.

We, however, must focus our attention on what al-Rāzī deems characteristic of the pursuit of philosophy and praiseworthy in Socrates’ life—namely, practicing justice, controlling the passions, and seeking knowledge. It is for this deficiency that he excuses himself, not for his solitary or abstemious practices. We must note, in addition, that despite having already acknowledged how Socrates distinguished himself as a soldier (para. 4, 99:17–18), al-Rāzī now cites only the virtues of justice, moderation, and wisdom; courage is passed over in silence. There is no place in his understanding of philosophy for the simply political virtue.

Though he admits to falling short of Socrates in these matters, he does not
think he therefore deserves blame: "We are not inferior if we acknowledge our failing with respect to him, for that is the truth and acknowledging the truth is more noble and virtuous" (para. 6, 100:13–14). Such honesty, surely not in al-Rāzī's own interest, allows him to avoid determining whether Socrates' standard is too high—too far beyond the reach of most human beings. Moreover, given the notion that Socrates' earlier devotion to philosophy was excessive, so excessive that he himself later turned away from it, al-Rāzī would be better advised to show that he directs himself according to the standard of the later Socrates. He cannot do so, however, for he has deftly avoided making Socrates' solitary austerity, or the pursuit of philosophy connected with it, an issue.

2. (Paras. 7–8) Another point also needs to be made, namely, al-Rāzī's contention that his critics can blame neither of Socrates' ways of life. Noting that what is at issue is the extent to which one practices solitary austerity, that no one would contend it is either virtuous or noble to give oneself up to passions and to prefer them, he refers to his famous book The Spiritual Medicine (al-Ṭibb al-Ruḥānī) for the first time (para. 7, 100:15–17). On the basis of what is set forth there, he insists that what is virtuous and noble is "taking each need to the extent that is indispensable" or that does not entail a pain exceeding the pleasure attached to it. Consequently, Socrates' early way of life is "truly blameworthy" insofar as it "leads to the ruination of the world and the perdition of people." That point conceded, however, al-Rāzī immediately counters with the observation made earlier, namely, that Socrates did turn back from it in time to "beget, war against the enemy, and attend sessions of festivities" (para. 8, 100:19–101:1 and see para. 4, 99:17–18).

Explicitly and implicitly, then, the argument is based on the idea that there is nothing inherently wrong with Socrates' early pursuit of solitary abstemiousness; it did not harm him, and he abandoned it in time to participate in activities conducing to human well-being. Differently stated, whatever the critics may claim, such conduct is not wrong per se nor against nature. It is to be judged in terms of its results—in quantitative terms, rather than in qualitative ones—and it becomes wrong only when followed to the point of threatening the well-being of the abstemious solitary or of the human race (see para. 7, 100:15–16).

Nor can his critics impugn al-Rāzī as being sated with desires just because he does not imitate Socrates' solitary austerity. The point is eminently sensible, but al-Rāzī then seeks to summarize the argument by contending that although he falls short of Socrates' earlier conduct (one he has now made defensible), he is still philosophical if compared to nonphilosophic people: "And we, even if we do not deserve the name of philosophy in comparison to Socrates, surely deserve its name in comparison to non-philosophic people" (para. 8, 101:3–4; see also 101:1–3). A more persuasive argument would begin by insisting that solitary austerity is always a threat to the world we live in and then praise the salubrious consequences of the life of the reformed Socrates.
That argument is not appropriate, however, for Socrates' begetting, warring, and merrymaking are not at issue for al-Rāzī's critics. Rather, it is whether doing those things prevents one from being philosophic. That al-Rāzī has engaged in activities similar to these is why they blame him, after all. But he chooses to pass over the question in silence. By phrasing his defense in quantitative terms, he fails to give an adequate account of the balanced life. What al-Rāzī needs to do here is show that, despite Socrates' later involvement in worldly activities, he continued to be as interested in philosophy as before. Or, even more to the point, al-Rāzī needs to argue that Socrates' earlier solitary austerity kept him from pursuing philosophy fully insofar as it prevented him from paying attention to the questions related to human conduct.

3. (Paras. 9–10) He takes up neither line of argument because either one would take him away from his next stated goal, namely, setting forth the argument that completes his depiction of the philosophic life. Such a claim notwithstanding, what follows is less an argument than an enumeration of six principles, all taken from other works. The reason given for setting them forth is that "we need to support . . . the goal we are intent upon in this treatise" by means of them (see para. 9, 101:7–8). Then, after mentioning the four works from which they are taken and insisting on the importance of The Spiritual Medicine, he lists the principles (101:13–102:5):

a. What occurs to us after death depends on the way we live now.

b. The reason for our being created is not to attain bodily pleasure, but to acquire knowledge and practice justice—they lead to release to the world without death or pain.

c. Nature and passion favor pleasure now, but intellect urges putting it aside for what is better.

d. Our Lord does not want us to cause pain, commit injustice, or be ignorant; and He punishes those who cause suffering.

e. We should not endure a pain hoping to get a pleasure that is inferior to it.

f. The Creator has given us the things we need to subsist and the means to them.

Three of these principles (a, d, and f) are based on premises that can be resolved only if the soundness of what has been revealed about God is granted, and the other three demand extensive discussion. Here, no defense of revelation is offered, nor does al-Rāzī do more than say that these principles have all been discussed elsewhere. Moreover, except for the two principles developed in the immediate sequel, he passes over all of the others in silence. The two he does consider are the one concerning pleasure (e), phrased almost as an imperative, and that concerning divine providence (d), with its concomitant obligation. Though the fourth principle does shed some light on the second and the fifth on the third, neither clarifies the first or the last principle.

4. (Paras. 11–14) The explanation of the fifth principle serves to confirm Socrates' wisdom in his earlier period of solitary abstinence. Al-Rāzī's argu-
ment is that if the pleasures in the life to come are neither intermittent nor limited, whereas pleasures in this life are both, it is foolish to place the former in jeopardy by pursuing the latter. He does concede, however, that all other pleasures would be permitted. Nonetheless, the philosopher will train himself to resist even these permitted pleasures, because such training makes it easier to resist.

The principle is sound and eminently reasonable, as long as the basic premise is true. Clearly, no one—normally thoughtful citizen no more than philosopher—would forego such restraint in order to pursue a pleasure likely to jeopardize greater pleasure in the next life. Still, we do not know whether the premise is sound. Nor is al-Rāzī willing to argue it here. For him, it is sufficient to posit the principle. Nonetheless, al-Rāzī does drop two hints here about the problematic character of the premise. First, he denotes the world to come as the world of the soul (para. 11, 102:10) and then brings in the ancients to vouch for at least some of what he sets forth here (para. 12, 102:15), leaving us to wonder how much they might have to say about the broader points.

5. (Paras. 15–22) Even more interesting is the fourth principle, that concerning the obligation we are under not to cause pain. Again, assuming that the premise to the effect that our Lord and Master watches over us with compassion is true, it follows that He does not want us to cause others pain. But since pain sometimes arises by a nonhuman cause, the reason must be that it is necessary and inevitable. Al-Rāzī does not say why it is necessary and inevitable, but it would seem to follow that it fits into a divine plan in some way unknown to us. The basic point—assuming the soundness of the original premise—is that we should cause no pain to any living creature not deserving it, unless the pain caused wards off a greater pain (para. 15, 103:14–104:4). This principle helps us understand what warrants many practices that would otherwise be deemed wrong, especially those related to hunting wild animals and to exerting or even mistreating those that have been domesticated. The first distinction, that between hunting—i.e., killing—wild animals and exerting tame ones is couched in terms of what kings do, as opposed to what ordinary people do. But it is pursued no further. Indeed, in attempting to explain how such actions might be carried out according to an intelligent and just rule—and thus be justified even though they cause a living creature pain—al-Rāzī momentarily neglects the question of hunting wild animals.

He begins by noting that certain medical practices presuppose the permissibility of inflicting a lesser pain so as to obtain a greater good: physicians sometimes cause patients to undergo painful treatment for the sake of reducing suffering or bringing about healing. Sometimes they even insist upon the patient ingesting foul substances or sacrificing a limb or organ in order to save the body (para. 16, 104:4–6). On another level, this line of reasoning permits inflicting pain on one species of being in order, thereby, to benefit a higher species. Thus al-Rāzī explains that a horse may be ridden hard—even to the
point of death—if that leads to the saving of human life, especially the life of a learned man or one valuable to the community (104:6–11). And on yet another level, the reasoning justifies inflicting pain—even death—on one member of the same species in order to preserve another member. Hence, when two men are in danger of perishing but one can be saved if the other is abandoned or allowed to die, al-Rāzī thinks it reasonable that the one most useful for the well-being of people survive (104:11–14).

The reasoning here tacitly assumes a hierarchy in nature. Insofar as we use other species of animals for our nourishment, we unreflectively abide by such a hierarchy in daily life. Nonetheless, we hesitate about, or even resist, its application to fellow human beings. Yet al-Rāzī is merely making explicit something we all seem to acknowledge implicitly, namely, that however equal human beings may be in principle, they are not all equal in fact—they are not all equally valuable to the community. Indeed, we follow such reasoning in voting, in exempting some individuals from military service, and in assigning military tasks. The only viable counters to the principle would be radical egalitarianism or insisting that, as the measure of all things, man is inviolate. Though easier to live with, neither is a priori any sounder than al-Rāzī's.

It must also be noted that the reasoning here goes back to the original acknowledgement of necessity bringing about pain and suffering (see para. 15, 103:15–17). Yet only the second example, inflicting pain upon one species in order to benefit another, explicitly corresponds to the original formulation of the problem (i.e., 104:1–4):

[There are all] sorts of wrongs, the pleasure kings take in hunting animals, and the excess to which people go in exerting tame animals when they use them. Now all of that must be according to an intelligent and just intent, rule, method, and doctrine—one that is not exceeded nor deviated from.

The first example depends upon an extension of the necessity argument and reminds us that we willingly submit to pain when persuaded it will bring greater good. Introduction of this greater good principle underlies the second example and also the third. More attention is paid in each of the latter two, however, to necessity. Though both it and pursuit of the greater good sometimes bring us to inflict pain upon ourselves, necessity as well as attention to the dictates of intellect and justice are needed to justify inflicting pain upon inferior species of being or—in extreme cases—upon one of our own (see para. 16, 104:7 and 8).

Al-Rāzī turns from this line of reasoning to the topic he passed over earlier, hunting. In keeping with the principle guiding the discussion, he holds that we may hunt and pursue only carnivorous animals and those that are dangerous but useless. Two considerations are adduced to justify their destruction. The first is that they will exterminate or harm other animals if left to themselves and the second is that in killing them, their future life is in no way harmed. This is
because the soul is fully released only from human bodies after death (paras. 17–18, 104:15–105:4, esp. para. 18, 104:18–105:3). That is, none but the human soul lives on apart from the body after death.

Though the two considerations are originally presented as applying to both groups of animals, that is, the carnivorous as well as those that are dangerous but useless, al-Rāzī later modifies his judgment. On the grounds that carnivorous animals necessarily threaten the existence of other animals, he restricts the first consideration so as to infer an obligation to exterminate them. Because dangerous but useless animals cause harm incidentally rather than necessarily, only the second consideration fully applies to them. Thus, no more than the right of destroying them can be inferred. Even the added distinction—namely, that they may be annihilated as well as exterminated—pales in comparison to his conclusion that the former “must be exterminated so far as possible” (para. 19, 105:4–9). Perhaps as a way of softening the harshness of this imperative, al-Rāzī invokes the hope that the passage of their souls “into more suitable bodies” will thereby be facilitated.8

Finally, the same line of reasoning about the nonhuman soul not living on after death comes to sanction killing tame and herbivorous animals. But the fact that the latter are useful in addition to being harmless dictates that they be treated gently and sacrificed only as needed.9 That the usefulness of animals, tame or dangerous, is judged solely from the human perspective is perfectly in keeping with al-Rāzī’s focus here on the best human life. He looks at the chain of being only insofar as it relates to human beings.

Apart from the medical treatment already discussed, causing pain to oneself is not permitted. The difference between the actions first examined—permissible pain inflicted upon oneself for the sake of health and upon other beings in order to achieve a greater good—and nonpermissible pain caused to oneself is stated in a preliminary manner here as what is regulated by the judgment of justice and intellect for the first actions and by the judgment of intellect for the second (see para. 21, 105:15–17). Later, however, the distinction is abandoned and nonmedical inflicting of pain on oneself called wrong because it goes against the larger principle: no greater good is attained by inflicting pain upon ourselves nor is any greater pain avoided (106:2–3).

Though it remains implicit, al-Rāzī’s thinking here seems to be that we come no closer to our Lord and Creator by such practices nor do we stifle any desires (see 105:17–19). There is a definite hierarchy in his enumeration of the kinds of pain different religious groups inflict upon themselves in this quest. The self-immolation and torture practiced by Hindus are simply repugnant to reason as are the acts of abuse engaged in by Manicheans. Explicitly stated as less serious are the seclusionary practices of Christians and Muslims and even the instances of self-neglect sometimes engaged in by the latter. Still, all of these are wrong insofar as they inflict pain but avoid no greater pain.

The discussion calls to mind Socrates’ earlier phase of solitary abstinence,
and he is mentioned here as having leaned somewhat to those who neglect themselves—that is, he was more like a Muslim or Christian than a Hindu or Manichean (see para. 22, 106:3–5 and para. 20, 105:13–14). Al-Rāzī does not elaborate, but we are aware that Socrates only inclined to them, that his austere or abstemious—perhaps even ascetic—practices did not lead him to inflict harm upon himself or to discipline his body in any way. Rather, they were the natural consequences of his neglecting immediate needs in order to devote himself more fully to the pursuit of philosophy. His asceticism, if it can be called that, was one of omission rather than of commission. Above all, it must be asked whether the discussion sheds new light on al-Rāzī’s earlier attempt to distinguish himself quantitatively from Socrates: precisely because such practices of inflicting pain upon oneself are unjust and lead to no new knowledge, we must wonder about the extent to which Socrates actually achieved justice and knowledge in his first way of life.

6. (Paras. 23–28) The discussion of these two principles permits al-Rāzī to formulate a general rule of conduct. Taking into account the diversity occasioned by wealth and upbringing, yet not wanting to do away with these roots, he states his rule in terms of upper and lower limits with respect to the maximum amount of pleasure one may seek—the upper limit—and the minimum amount of pleasure one may seek—the lower limit. The maximum for enjoyment is phrased, drawing on the preceding discussion, in terms of seeking no pleasure that causes hurt to another being or leads to its death (see para. 25, 106:18–107:2 with paras. 23–24, 106:7–18). The lower limit is defined in terms of not limiting oneself in the pursuit of pleasures in such a way as to expose the body to danger or weaken it, while at the same time making the preservation of the body—and not seeking pleasure—one’s primary goal (see para. 26, 107:3–12).

Guidelines restricting the pursuit of pleasure are set forth in the discussion of both the upper and lower limits, the two differing with respect to the way pleasure is acquired and its object. For the upper limit, the examples focus on pleasure sought by means of another or at another’s expense, whereas for the lower limit they have to do with pleasure that is more personal: nourishment, clothing, and shelter. Thus, though constraining the quest for pleasure is urged in both, the discussion of permissible pleasure in the lower limit insists upon giving a minimal amount of attention to the body. It is, however, a strict minimum: the principle, first stated in terms of not being too lenient with the body or pursuing more than what is needed merely to preserve it, that is, seeking things because they are enjoyable (para. 26, 107:3–9), is then expanded to include exhortation to training in doing without (para. 26, 107:9–12 and also para. 27, 107:13–15). Later, it becomes evident that al-Rāzī is also concerned about the least one can permit oneself—anything less than that least being overly harsh and similar to the blameworthy self-inflicted pains enumerated in the preceding subsection (para. 28, 107:15–108:1).
The standard used to explain how one understands the upper limit is the judgment of intellect or justice or—and, though mentioned here for the first time, presented as an equivalent—what displeases God. Moreover, despite initial hesitations and false allusions, al-Rāzī eventually formulates a standard based on the judgment of intellect and justice in order to determine the lower limit. First he says that infringing the second understanding of the lower limit is unjust (107:17), then that it is against philosophy (107:17–108:1)—that is, against reason or the intellect. But he says nothing about displeasing God, content perhaps to let the references to Hindus, Manicheans, and Christians carry the implication.

With respect to the lower limit, the diversity of human character and habit must be respected. Shelter suitable for a man of modest means will not be adequate for one used to elegant dwellings, nor will a man of modest means be able to accommodate himself to an elegant dwelling without the kind of struggle that will hinder him from his primary goal (para. 26, 107:3–9). The disparities caused by such differences in fortune provoke al-Rāzī to no suggestions about the need to strive for a more equitable distribution of wealth or to regulate the way it is passed on. Completely eschewing such excursions into politics and political economy, he notes merely that the less wealthy may have an easier time of abiding by the lower limit and that, all things considered, it is preferable to lean more towards that limit (para. 26, 107:9–12 and especially para. 27, 107:13–15).

7. (Para. 29) The summary statement of the philosophic life, that to which all of the preceding contributes, consists of four basic parts. It begins with al-Rāzī asserting certain qualities of the Creator. He then seeks a rule of conduct based on an analogy between the way servants seek to please their sovereigns or owners and the way we should please our Sovereign Master. Next he draws a conclusion from that analogy about the character of philosophy. And he ends with the declaration that the fuller explanation of this summary statement is to be found in The Spiritual Medicine.

The way al-Rāzī moves from the assertion about the qualities of the Creator to the conclusion that the goal of philosophy is to be as much like God as possible is extraordinarily subtle and inventive. It consists of a conditional syllogism along with an explanation of what the syllogism is intended to mean. The first premise of the conditional syllogism is that the Creator is a knower ignorant of nothing and so just as to commit no injustice. Then, setting forth the second premise as an explanation of the kind of knowledge and justice appropriate to the Creator, namely, knowledge and justice without qualification, al-Rāzī adds—without further argument—that compassion or mercy (rahmah) is also of this character (108:5). It is not clear whether compassion is added so that the reader not conceive of justice in the present context as necessarily harsh and unyielding or because one cannot speak of justice as related to the Creator without thinking also of compassion. At any rate, its introduction has certainly not been prepared by the preceding discussion. The third premise
states the relationship between us and the Creator: He is to us as a creator and a master (mālik), whereas we are to Him as slaves and vassals (abīd mamlūkīn). So stated, it abuts in a logical discrepancy. If God is to us as a creator and master, then we should be to Him as creatures and vassals or as creatures and slaves; but God's being our Creator does not make us His slaves. Al-Rāzī drops the logical parallelism between the creator and created in order to introduce one less obvious, namely, that between the Creator as Master and us as indebted to this Master. Politics enters into consideration given the relationship between us and the Creator, but it is a politics based on a hierarchy that can never be collapsed. The final premise, posed solely from the perspective of subjection, is that the slaves most loved by their owners (mawālihīm) are those who adhere most closely to their ways of life and are most observant of their traditions (108:5–6).

On the basis of these premises, al-Rāzī concludes that "the slaves closest to God, may He be magnified and glorified, are those who are most learned, most just, most compassionate, and most kindly" (108:7). The idea is that we must be to our Master as slaves are to their owners; we must follow His way of life and traditions. Perhaps, since knowledge and justice do not fully encompass God's life and traditions, al-Rāzī finds it necessary to add compassion in the second premise and kindliness in the conclusion. But both are added without explanation. In each instance, the language al-Rāzī chooses permits one to think that he is merely drawing on other qualities of God so as to ward off any attempt to restrict justice. To be sure, revelation apprises us that God's justice is tempered with mercy and kindliness—the justice of divine punishment, even the punishment of the day of judgment, notwithstanding. In the end, al-Rāzī's refusal here to explain why he so mingles God's justice with mercy and kindliness leaves us to wonder whether it is merely an indirect suggestion to his detractors that they should so temper their sense of justice in reaching judgment about him.

It is not possible to answer such questions on the basis of the text before us. Al-Rāzī has made it impossible to pursue the inquiry by the way he has structured the syllogism. This syllogism, he further asserts, embodies what all philosophers mean when they say "philosophy is making oneself similar to God, may He be magnified and glorified, to the extent possible for a human being" (108:8–9). Even more importantly, "this is the sum of the philosophic life." This summary description recalls Socrates' playful attempt to persuade Theodorus that those who truly deserve to be called philosophers have no need of the knowledge most men praise, that their greater or deeper knowledge leads them to flee the world in order to become as much like the deity as they can. It is, nonetheless, an incident relating to Socrates' life that is in no way alluded to here. Nor, replete as it is with implications, does al-Rāzī present this summary statement as his full account of what constitutes the philosophic life. That account is to be found in another work, The Spiritual Medicine. We must turn to
it, says al-Rāzī, because there he mentions (a) how we can rid ourselves of "bad moral habits" and (b) "the extent to which someone aspiring to be philosophic ought to concern himself with gaining a livelihood, acquisition, expenditure, and seeking ranks of rulership" (108:10–12). In other words, the definition of the philosophic life set forth here raises questions that al-Rāzī elsewhere identifies as relating to moral virtue, especially moral purification, and human affairs—economics as well as political rule. At no point does he suggest that this fuller or more detailed understanding of philosophy is at odds with the summary statement. It seems, rather, that a complete account of what is involved in seeking knowledge, struggling to act justly, and being compassionate as well as kindly encompasses matters that fall under a discussion of moral virtue or ethics, household management or economics, and political rule. These activities must be seen in particular contexts—that relating to the improvement of the individual first of all, then to the betterment of the household, and finally to the well-being of the political community. Moreover, some hierarchy must be established among the different pursuits. In the Book of the Philosophic Life, however, we find no reflections of this kind. They are absent precisely because the work is so devoid of a political perspective.

As presented here, for example, compassion and kindliness appear almost as afterthoughts and surely as qualities less important than knowledge and justice. Yet compassion and kindliness fit in more readily with the emphasis in the treatise on what might be called the personal part of the definition of philosophy, that relating to moral virtue. Even justice, thus far defined primarily as not causing pain to others and explicitly linked with our understanding of God and what He desires for us, is thereby presented in a personal manner. To be sure, it is possible to extract the skeleton of a political argument from the discussion about a hierarchy among human beings that was introduced in the discussion of the fourth of the six principles comprising what al-Rāzī says is his "complete" statement of the philosophic life—especially insofar as the superiority of one man over another is stated in terms of his being more useful for the well-being of the people (see para. 16, 104:11–13). It is difficult to take that argument very far, however, because al-Rāzī says so little about it anywhere in this work. An attempt to extract more of a political teaching from the Book of the Philosophic Life is likewise frustrated by his reluctance to speak here of the Creator as the Governor of the universe or of our relationship to Him in terms of His being like a Governor to us rather than as being like a Lord or Master to us.


The claim that a fuller statement of these issues is to be found in The Spiritual Medicine must not lead us to disparage the present work. Indeed, in his
attempt to justify his right to be considered a philosopher, al-Rāzī insists that had he been capable of nothing more than composing the Book of the Philo-
sophic Life, it would be enough to prevent anyone daring to deprive him of the name philosopher (para. 31, 108:18–20). This praise of the book is part of his explanation of what he has accomplished with respect to the scientific part of philosophy, science or knowledge (‘ilm) being one of the two parts of philoso-
phy and practice (‘amal) being the other. Accordingly, al-Rāzī seeks to justify himself by elaborating on what he has done in each of these domains and challenging his detractors to show that they have accomplished as much—espe-
cially in the realm of science.

In turning to this exculpatory argument, al-Rāzī notes that the preceding explanation constitutes something of a digression:

Since we have explained what we wanted to explain with respect to this topic, we will return and explain what pertains to us. And we will mention those who de-
fame us and will mention that even until this day we have not lived a life—due to success granted by God and to His assistance—such that we deserve to be ex-
cluded from being designated “philosopher.” (Para. 30, 108:13–15, my emphasis)

Now it is not clear where this digression first begins. As I order it in the division of the text followed here, it starts immediately after the introduction to the whole treatise. In this sense, the whole second part comprising the justifica-
tion of Socrates’ way of life, the complete statement of the philosophic life, and the final summary of it are all part of the digression (that is, paras. 4–29, 99:14–108:12). One could, however, make a plausible argument for including the two attempts to justify Socrates’ early, solitary, and abstemious life (paras. 4–8, 99:14–101:4—identified here as the first two subsections of Part B) as part of the argument prior to what al-Rāzī speaks of now as having been a digression. Still, under no circumstances is it possible to interpret the complete statement of the philosophic life, the explanations of the fourth and fifth prin-
ciples, and the last two accounts of what that statement and explanations mean as anything but what he refers to here as a digression.14 Differently stated, the core of this treatise is external to the occasion for its writing—al-Rāzī’s need to justify his life to contemporary detractors. The core of the book, the full under-
standing of the philosophic life, obliges us to confront his larger teaching. For that, or so it would seem, we need no forensic impetus.

Contending that philosophy consists of two things, knowledge and prac-
tice—that is, knowing what a philosopher is supposed to know and doing what a philosopher is supposed to do—al-Rāzī insists that on both counts he has done what is needed. His proof concerning knowledge consists in an enumera-
tion of books he has written, including this one (para. 31, 108:18–109:9); a summary statement that these compositions amount to about two hundred books, treatises, and pamphlets about the physical and metaphysical branches of philosophy (109:10–11); an explanation of why he has not delved more
that pursuit deeply into mathematics coupled with a summary dismissal of those who think that pursuit deserves more attention (para. 32, 109:11–14); and an assertion that if these activities do not qualify him for the title of philosopher then he can imagine no one of his age so deserving (para. 33, 109:14–16).

Al-Rāzī’s enumeration of at least fifteen books and treatises here—plus a mention of several books dealing with particular subjects—follows no particular order, but it does fall into some general categories. After lauding the present book as sufficient grounds for his being considered a philosopher, he adduces the titles of four books. The first concerns logic, the second metaphysics; the third is the enigmatic *The Spiritual Medicine*; and the fourth is about physics. There follows an enumeration of six treatises, each having to do with physical science or astronomy. He then returns to speaking about books he has written and mentions some having to do with physical science, specifically, books about the soul and about matter (*al-hayūla*). The enumeration of books, rather than treatises, continues. Now, however, al-Rāzī explicitly lists a series of five books having to do with medicine and speaks of them as merely an indication of what he has written on the subject. Finally, he speaks of books he has written about the art of wisdom, something the common people call *al-Kīmiyyā*—i.e., alchemy.

Thus the list proceeds from an enumeration of books to one of treatises and back to one of books. As presented here, the subjects treated in these writings move from a defense of, or apology for, philosophy (forensic philosophy); pass to logic and metaphysics; rise to a high point with a subject combining metaphysics, physics, and medicine for the soul (*The Spiritual Medicine*); move to physics in general and, after particular aspects of physics, on to medicine; and end with alchemy. Intrigued as we might be by the reference to works on alchemy at the end of the enumeration, it is not those writings to which al-Rāzī attaches great importance in the sequel, but to his medical work that he terms the large *Summary* (see para. 37, 110:12–15).

In defending himself with respect to practice, al-Rāzī draws the reader’s attention to the two limits set forth as a summary of his explanation of the fourth and fifth principles above and claims that he has never infringed them. Yet he has frequented the mighty and certainly enjoys more wealth than Socrates, so he turns to an account of his worldly activities. It is al-Rāzī’s contention that in being a companion to the ruler (*sultan*), he has merely acted as a physician and advisor for the ruler’s personal well-being as well as for that of the community. (What al-Rāzī thinks of the community of citizens in relation to the ruler is aptly indicated by his choice of words at this juncture: he speaks of the citizens or subjects as the sultan’s herd or flock [*ra’iyyatuh*]). Though al-Rāzī insists that he has never served as a warrior or administrator, it is not immediately obvious why he seeks to emphasize the point. After all, Socrates served as a warrior when he turned away from his ascetic ways.

At any rate, al-Rāzī turns next to an account of how he handles money. He
claims that he neither accumulates it nor spends it loosely. Moreover, thinking still of the acquisition and use of money, he insists that he does not seek quarrels, attack others, or harm them. Another count on which he seeks to excuse himself is likewise related to money—namely, his conduct with respect to clothing, mounts, and male as well as female servants—but al-Rāzī brings his denial of excess with respect to these matters under another heading. In these matters—as well as with expenditures having to do with food, drink, and festivities—al-Rāzī asserts that he refrains from excess. Thus, having insisted that nothing in his private or public life and nothing with respect to the way he treats others or disposes of his wealth is blameworthy, much less unbecoming the philosophic life, al-Rāzī closes his self-justification by noting that those who frequent or observe him know how dedicated he is to the pursuit of knowledge. Two things can be cited in evidence of the intensity of his quest for knowledge. The first is something of a character trait that has been with him since youth, namely, his inability to let a book go unread or a man unsounded even if doing so leads to major inconvenience or detriment. The second concerns the way he has weakened his sight and paralyzed his hand through the long hours spent writing his Summary for the last fifteen years. Both, however, point to excess that goes beyond the lower of the two limits: One is not supposed to harm oneself in the pursuit of wisdom.

D. The Conclusion (Paras. 38–40, 110:16–111:7)

In closing, al-Rāzī poses a double challenge to those who disparage his way of life and would deny him the title of philosopher. The defiance has to do with the two parts into which philosophy was divided in the preceding section, knowledge and practice. His final words are not contentious, however, but conciliatory. In the end, he wants only to ensure that his writings are given the attention they deserve.

As concerns practice, he asks them for a clear statement of what they think constitutes the philosophic life. If they deem his personal conduct or his definition of the philosophic life to fall short, they should explain their view so that he can accept it if it is truly superior or refute it if it is not. Even conceding, for the sake of argument, a shortcoming with respect to practice, al-Rāzī demands they also state wherein he errs with respect to knowledge. In both instances his reasoning is that he may profit from such a statement if they are correct or refute it if they are wrong. He does not think they can fault him on this count, however, and invokes doggerel to urge that they pay more attention to what he says than to what he does. In the end, it is the teaching that counts far more than the practice.

The work ends, then, on what is almost an admission that his practical life does fall short. But the only error to which he has admitted thus far—and that only by implication—is to being excessive in his pursuit of learning.
III. AL-RĀZĪ’S POLITICAL TEACHING

Clearly, the political teaching of this work is set forth only by implication. Neither in the exposition of Socrates’ life nor in the indications he gives of his own does al-Rāzī address the goal for which Socrates turned from solitary, abstemious practices to concern with human things. And, except for three inadvertent suggestions, it is difficult to discern how he would like to see the community ruled. For the most part, in fact, al-Rāzī portrays philosophy as a pursuit carried out apart from politics.

Questions of rule arise primarily with respect to personal, i.e., ethical issues. The crucial question concerns the greater or lesser usefulness one citizen or another may have for the community. Reflection upon the Creator does not lead to an awareness of divine order or diverse levels of governance within the universe, but to an image of ownership and rulership much like that a master has over slaves. There is a hierarchy, to be sure, but it is a very rigid and stratified kind of hierarchy. And this image of rule as ownership finds further expression in al-Rāzī’s passing remark about the way he occasionally advises the ruler with respect to his “flock.”

The considerations that prompted Socrates to turn away from inquiring into the heavens and natural phenomena, to turn from a solitary and austere pursuit of philosophy that paid little attention to human affairs, in order to concern himself with human needs and the things humans seek in daily life are not made explicit here. Nor does al-Rāzī pay attention to the content of Socrates’ teaching during his solitary, abstemious period or during his period of involvement with humans. He pays no more attention to what Socrates thought and taught than to what he himself thinks and teaches. In part, this is due to the fact that this book on the philosophic life is presented as dependent upon al-Rāzī’s other writings, especially on The Spiritual Medicine. The extent to which that work completes this one is set forth very tellingly in the final explanation of his summary of the philosophic life, a summary that points to the manner in which The Spiritual Medicine provides the fuller teaching about the two parts of philosophy missing here—household management or economics and politics.

Yet it must be noted that al-Rāzī has indirectly enlarged the sphere of philosophy in this treatise. He has indicated how philosophy must go beyond inquiry into individual ethics and natural phenomena in order to explore the relationship between individuals of the same species. Nature does inform that inquiry, to be sure, but the implications of the information it provides are the subject of further investigation. It is by no means clear, for example, to what extent one human being can exploit another on the basis of an acknowledged inequality between them. And even though convention provides for a form of political rule in which the ruler tends to look upon subjects as a herd rather than as autonomous individuals, al-Rāzī makes no attempt to argue that such conventional rule accords in any way with nature or with what is best for human
beings. Finally, though he has adroitly referred to the Creator and His provision for us here, thereby indicating that we must reflect upon the Creator and His providence in order to understand some of our customary practices as well as how we can live as humanly as possible, al-Rāzī has not indicated to what extent the Creator’s instructions to us—His revelation by means of a lawgiver, for example—accord with what philosophy leads us to understand about human well-being and political order.

These issues—all raised, though not fully resolved in The Book of the Philosophic Life—are said to be treated at greater length in The Spiritual Medicine. This is not to say that The Book of the Philosophic Life is less important than The Spiritual Medicine. Precisely because the latter work is presented as an ethical treatise and consequently as having little to do with politics, this investigation of the philosophic life provides the necessary introduction to it and teaches us how to refocus its apparent emphasis on ethics.

From this smaller treatise we learn a lesson not addressed in the larger one, namely, that the philosophic life must go beyond solitary austerity or abstemious withdrawal—however much such conduct furthers deep reflection—to concern with fellow human beings. Everything set forth in the digression leading up to the summary definition of the philosophic life points to this conclusion: the blame of Socrates’ early life as due to youthful excess; the emphasis on not causing pain to oneself or to others, even to irrational animals, except under special circumstances; and, above all, the constant reminder that, however elusive, we cannot escape the notion of the universe being orderly, even directed toward our own well-being. Al-Rāzī’s two portraits of Socrates, taken together with his not so irrelevant digression, reveal the deeper strata of willing involvement in household matters as well as in the pleasures and the toils of citizenship. Even the unusual insistence on Socrates remaining faithful to his early vegetarian habits begins to make sense given this larger perspective. This, perhaps, is what lies behind the enigmatic claim cited at the beginning of this analysis, namely, that in al-Rāzī’s Book of the Philosophic Life we find “the clearest and most thoughtful exposition of” Socrates’ “conversion from a youthful contempt for the political or moral things, for the human things or human beings, to a mature concern with them.”

NOTES

I have benefitted greatly from, and thus am grateful for, both Hillel Fradkin’s formal critique of this essay (“Vegetarians with Bloody Hands: Some Comments on ‘The Origins of al-Rāzī’s Political Philosophy,’” by Charles E. Butterworth,” presented at the Society for Greek Political Thought panel of the 1991 American Political Science Meetings in Washington, D.C.) and the insightful comments of Hilail Gildin.

1. Leo Strauss, Socrates and Aristophanes (New York: Basic Books, 1966), p. 314. This passage must be read not only in context but also with an eye to Strauss’ starting point, namely, the
suggestion of a common thread between Aristophanes' attack on Socrates and the later, equally harsh, attack by Nietzsche (see pp. 3–8, esp. 6–8).

2. For a characterization of the work's passion and basic appeal, see Paul Kraus, “Raziana I,” Orientalita 4 (1935), p. 303: “The 'Book of the Conduct of the Philosopher' is not only, as its title might make it seem, a simple exposition of Razi's ethical ideal. Its principal interest resides in the personal character it sets forth: In it, Razi presents an apology for his life. Having reached a somewhat advanced age, he sees himself attacked by adversaries who deny him the title of ‘philosopher’ and denigrate the high moral ideal he has set for himself. Perfectly aware of his worth, Razi replies to his adversaries. He declares that he has been faithful to his philosophic ideal and has rendered human beings great service by his scientific activity. Let us not forget that this is a physician who speaks to us, a physician impregnated with the best Greek traditions, distant from any ascetic tendency, whose great care is to attain the perfect equilibrium that had characterized his masters from antiquity. Rarely in Arabic literature do we have the opportunity to hear so strong a voice, one expressing itself with such an accent of personality and warmth and in the service of such a legitimate cause.” (The translation is mine, as is the emphasis.)


4. Kraus inserts 'anhu, apparently on the basis of sense.

5. Note the way this suggestion is developed by al-Fārābī in his Philosophy of Plato, para. 36; in Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, trans. with an intro., Muhsin Mahdi (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1962). Though both al-Fārābī (257/870–339/950) and al-Rāzī (251/865–313/925) were in Baghdad sometime between 282/895 and 293/905, they seem to have had no contact; we know only that al-Fārābī is said to have written a treatise against al-Rāzī's metaphysical teaching.

6. See Plato Theages 128b; also Apology 23a–b.


8. See para. 19, 105:5–6 and Kraus, “Raziana I,” p. 328, n. 1. Still, by denying that animal souls may pass from body to body until they finally reach the stage of humanity, al-Rāzī escapes the problem of explaining why human souls do not regress to enter the bodies of irrational animals.

9. Noting here that those who engage in philosophy (al-mutafalsifīn) disagree about whether the souls of such animals live on or not and that some therefore did not approve of eating meat, al-Rāzī adds that Socrates did not approve of it; see para. 20, 105:13–14 and para. 4, 99:18. This aside obliges us to wonder whether Socrates held the same opinion as they did about the souls of animals surviving. (Though the term al-mutafalsifīn is sometimes used in a pejorative sense to mean those who pride themselves on engaging in philosophy, it does not seem to be used in that sense here.)

10. He explicitly mentions Hindus and Manicheans in this section. Then monks (al-ruḥbān) and recluses (al-nussāk). When speaking earlier of pains Christians inflict upon themselves through neglect, he cited monasticism (al-tarāhhub) and withdrawal into hermitages (al-takhlaltī al-sawāmī) as examples of such practices. The juxtaposition of the two passages suggests that al-Rāzī wishes to exempt Islam from any of these criticisms, for nothing he said of Muslims earlier (see para. 21, 105:20–106:2) corresponds to anything mentioned here.

11. Schematically, the steps of the syllogism are as follows:
(a) Since the Creator is a knower ignorant of nothing and so just as to commit no injustice;
(b) and since His knowledge and justice are without qualification, as is His compassion;
(c) and so since He is a Creator and Master to us, whereas we are slaves and vassals to Him;
(d) and since the slaves most loved by their owners adhere most clearly to their way of life and are most observant of their traditions;
(e) therefore “the slaves closest to God, may He be magnified and glorified, are those who are most learned, most just, most compassionate, and most kindly.”

12. See Plato Theaetetus 176a-c. Socrates, however, associates the deity with justice and practical wisdom or prudence as well as with piety or holiness, thereby suggesting that even the deity prizes the kind of knowledge needed for political life. See also Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics 10.8.1179a22–32. Though he speaks only of the intellectual virtue of intelligence (nous) in this passage, identifying it as the quality distinctive of the wise man, the discussion occurs in the context of Aristotle’s attempt to determine which human virtue is best for a person to pursue so as to achieve happiness. His analysis leads to the conclusion that intelligence and wisdom allow the person possessing them to understand how best to lead an excellent human life, that such a person is most loved by the gods, and that this constitutes happiness.

13. The equivalent term in Arabic would be mudabbir al-‘ālam or al-mudabbir li-al-‘ālam; see al-Fārābī, Kitāb al-Millah (Book of Religion), in al-Fārābī, Kitāb al-Millah wa Nuṣṭūs Ukhra, ed. Muhsin Mahdi (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1968), para. 27; an English translation of this treatise by Charles Butterworth is forthcoming in the new edition of Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi, Medieval Political Philosophy, A Sourcebook.


15. These books are: On Demonstration (Fi al-Burḥān), On Divine Science (Fi al-‘Ilm al-Ilāhī), On Spiritual Medicine (Fi al-Tibb al-Ruḥānī), and On an Introduction to Physical Science (Fi al-Madkhal ilā al-‘Ilm al-Tabī‘ī). The last, he says, is also known as Lecture on Nature (Sam‘ al-Kiyān).

16. These are: On Time, Place, Matter, Eternity, and Vacuum (Fi al-Zamān wa al-Makān wa al-Maddah wa al-Dahr wa al-Khiṣā‘), On the Form of the World (Fi Shāk al-‘Ālam), On the Reason for the Earth Arising in the Middle of the [Heavenly] Sphere (Fi Sabāb Qiyām al-Arḍ fī Wust al-Falak), On the Reason the [Heavenly] Sphere Has Circular Movement (Fi Sabāb Taharruk al-Falak ‘alā Istidārah), On Composition (Fi al-Tarkīb), and On Body Having Its Own Motion and This Motion Being Known (Fi anna li-al-Jism Ḥarakah min Dhātiḥ wa anna al-Ḥarakah Ma‘lūmah).

17. The books he mentions here are as follows: The Mansūrī Book (al-Kitāb al-Mansūrī), Book to Those Whom the Physician Does not Visit (Kitāb ilā man lā yahdaruh Tabīḥ), and Book about Existing Drugs (Kitāb fī al-Adawiyah al-Mawjudah). The two books he mentions by something other than their proper titles are: Royal Medicine (al-Tibb al-Mulākī), The Summary (al-Jam‘ī). There is another book on medicine attributed to al-Rāzī about which he says nothing here. This work, Kitāb al-Madkhal ilā Ṣinā‘at al-Tibb, wa huwa Ḥisāghājī, has been edited and translated into Spanish, with an introduction and technical glossary, by María de la Concepción Vázquez de Benito under the title Libro de la introducción al Arte de la Medicina o “Isagoge” (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 1979).

18. Of the works enumerated here, only two—Fi al-‘Ilm al-Ilāhī (On Divine Science) and Fi al-Tibb al-Ruḥānī (On Spiritual Medicine)—are among the four listed as the sources for the six principles enumerated in subsection 3 of Part B above (see p. 243 above with para. 9, 101:9–11). They are the first two of that listing. The fourth, “our book characterized as The Glory of the Art of Alchemy” (Kitābunā al-mawsūm bi-Sharaf Ṣinā‘at al-Kimīyā‘), seems to find an indirect reference in what he says here of books in which he has written about “the art of wisdom.” But of the third, Kitābun fi Adhli Man Istighall bi-Fudjīl al-Handasah min al-Mawsūmin bi-al-Falsafah (“our book On Blaming Those Characterized as Philosophers Who Occupy Themselves with What Is Superficial in Geometry”), nothing whatever is said. Apart from the Book of the Spiritual Medicine, none of these books has come down to us. However, Paul Kraus has presented fragments of On Divine Science culled from the critique other authors made of al-Rāzī’s teaching; see Rasā’il, pp. 165–70 and 191–94 with 170–90 and 195–216.
Shakespeare’s Demonic Prince

GRANT B. MINDLE
University of North Texas

Richard. Why Buckingham, I say I would be king.
Buckingham. Why, so you are, my thrice-renowned lord.
Richard. Ha! Am I king? (IV.ii.12–14)

Shakespeare’s Richard III is the story of a man who would be king, a chronicle of a tyrant who tries to “clothe [his] naked villainy” by setting “the murdererous Machiavel to school” (I.iii.335; 3 Henry VI, III.ii.193). A murderer without a “touch of pity,” a consummate “liar,” a “subtle, false and treacherous” villain, Richard is perfectly, splendidly, and delightfully wicked (cf. Disc., I.27). His best conspiracies are conceived and executed in the spirit of Machiavelli, exploiting the vanity of his victims.

Richard III is “the only one of Shakespeare’s kings explicitly associated with Machiavelli.”2 There are other Shakespearean kings whose ascent and reign are marred by injustice, but their wickedness is imperfect and half-hearted and their demeanor too solemn to classify them as Machiavellian. Bolingbroke would never have deposed his cousin but for Richard II’s complicity in their uncle’s death. Macbeth, despite his “vaulting ambition” would never have raised his hand against Duncan but for the witches’ prophecy and the intercession of his wife (Macbeth, I.vii.27). Their royal ambitions were kindled by their pride in their own virtue, and their consciousness of their superiority to the monarchs whose thrones they usurped. Bolingbroke hoped to “purge the throne of the stain left on it by Richard’s having committed the sin of Cain,” but when to his consternation he is forced to commit the same sin “he is stricken with remorse,” his sense of moral superiority shattered.3 Thinking himself preeminent in manliness, Macbeth embarks upon the murder of Duncan prepared to “jump the life to come,” but the weight of his actions is more than even he can bear, his “guilty conscience betray[ing] him at every turn” (Macbeth, I.vii.7).4

Unlike Richard, Bolingbroke and Macbeth have some regard for morality, for their obligations as kinsman, subject, and host (Richard II, V.iii; vi.24–52; Macbeth, I.vii.1–28; but cf. Richard III, III.i.108–9; IV.ii.59–64). To Richard,
"Conscience is but a word that cowards use; / Devised at first to keep the strong in awe; / Our strong arms be our conscience, swords our law!" (V.iii.310–12). He is neither surprised nor unduly perturbed by the harm he does. No one murders more deliberately and seemingly more serenely than Richard III (V.iii.198). The murder of Lady Anne is anticipated prior to their marriage, and then announced to the audience in a soliloquy with a lightheartedness which is surprisingly and frightfully amusing (I.ii.227–29). Richard’s numerous professions of remorse are comical performances by a skilled actor who knows how to “quake and change [his] color” whenever the occasion requires (III.v.1; see also I.iii.305–18, 323–37; III.vii.210; IV.ii.64; 3 Henry VI, III.ii.182–92). The downfall of a tragic hero is inevitably an act of self-destruction brought on by pride or hubris; his suffering elicits our pity, because we mourn the loss of his virtues, and our terror, because were it not for his virtues, he would not have suffered so. But we feel no pity for Richard III (V.iii.202–4). His final words—"A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!" (V.iv.13)—are more befitting a comedy than a tragedy. He is inferior to his victims, and he knows it (3 Henry VI, III.ii.165–67).

Hath she forgot already that brave prince,
Edward her lord, whom I, some three months since,
Stabbed in my angry mood at Tewkesbury?
A sweeter and a lovelier gentleman
Framed in the prodigality of nature
Young, valiant, wise, and, no doubt, right royal
The spacious world cannot again afford. (I.ii.239–45)

Not pride or even hubris, but what we shall call for want of a better word “self-contempt” is the key to Richard’s being. “Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature,” he cannot imagine himself worthy of anyone’s love (I.1.19). His ugliness, though he endeavors to conceal it from others, he readily and eloquently concedes to himself in his soliloquies. No one, not even his most ardent enemies, ridicules Richard half so well as Richard ridicules himself.

Richard III begins with a soliloquy, the only one of Shakespeare’s plays to begin in this way. As Tracy Strong astutely observed, what “interests Shakespeare [is] not just [Richard’s] actions,” but “what is going on inside” Richard’s head (p. 204). Not “made to court an amorous looking glass,” or “strut before a wanton ambling nymph,” Richard is “determined to prove a villain/ And hate the idle pleasures of these days” (I.i.15, 17, 30–31; see also 3 Henry VI, III.ii.153–71; V.vi.68–91. Cf. the reference to “ambitious leisure” in Disc. I. preface). Unlike Bolingbroke and Macbeth, his rebellion is kindled by his sense of inferiority. Richard has no right to rule, but also no regard for natural right. The plot of Richard III is not a revolution—"The first and most fundamental cause of revolution is . . . the different conceptions men have of justice”—but a conspiracy, boldly conceived and executed by one alone whose motive is surprisingly private and trivial: its author’s inadequacy as a lover.
Everything Richard does, every lie, every betrayal, every murder, is premeditated. "Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous/ By drunken prophecies, libels, and dreams/ To set my brother Clarence and the King/ In deadly hate the one against the other" (I.i.32–34). Seven lines later, Clarence appears on stage accompanied by an armed guard appointed by the king to convey him to the Tower. Throughout the play, this pattern is repeated again and again. Richard tells us what needs to be done, does it, and then pauses to pat himself on the back. His successes are so astonishing, his conceits so clever, his victims so foolish, and his sense of humor and self-contempt so wonderful that we are apt to hate him less than we should. "I am possessed with admiration of the genuine Richard, his genius, and his mounting spirit, which no consideration of his cruelties can depress."10

The England portrayed in the opening lines of Richard’s first soliloquy is at peace (I.i.1–2). After years of civil war, the time has come to put away our "bruised arms" and "barbéd steeds," and dedicate our lives to dancing and romance. Love is the order of the day. And yet, the passions which seem to stir the hearts of Edward IV’s subjects most fervently are ambition and revenge (II.iii.27–28). Buckingham covets title to the earldom of Hereford and its movables (IV.ii.87–90); Lord Hastings is eager "to give them thanks/ That were the cause of [his] imprisonment" (I.i.127–28). So great is the suspicion, ill-will and injustice in Edward’s England that the most frivolous of accusations commands a sympathetic hearing: "This day shall Clarence closely be mewed up/ About a prophecy which says that G of Edward’s heirs the murderer shall be" (I.i.38–40; II.i.133–34) (Stubbs, quoted in Furness, p. 1).

Surrounded by fools less proficient in the use of arms than he, Richard has no difficulty sowing dissension within the ranks of the nobility. Like his teacher, the notorious Machiavel, he wages war by force and especially fraud. Richard is truly an "artist in evil," and yet, the righteous have no cause to criticize Richard’s handiwork (Rossiter, quoted in the Signet edition, p. 248). With the possible exception of the young princes, Edward V and Richard, Duke of York, the victims of his tyranny are justly punished (but see I.iii.198–208; II.i.133–34; ii.33–35; IV.iv.61–66). Lady Anne is the butt of her own curse: "If ever he has wife, let her be made/ More miserable by the life of him/ Than I am made by my young lord and thee!" (I.i.26–28, 113, 131–32; IV.i.58–62, 65–86). George, Duke of Clarence, is guilty of perjury and murder (I.iii.134–38, 312–14; iv.46–68, 204–18, 223–26; 3 Henry VI, V.v.34–40). Rivers, Grey, Vaughan, and Hastings stood by while Edward Prince of Wales was "stabbed by bloody daggers" (I.i.127–28; iii.89–91, 209–13; II.i.7–27; III.i.99–103; iv.14–16; IV.iv.68–70). Hastings, contrary to his oath "swear[ing] perfect love" to the Queen’s brethren, was overjoyed by their arrest and sentencing: "This day those enemies are put to death,/ And I in better state that e’er I was" (II.i.9–28; III.i.181–85; ii.49–103; iv.87–92). Buckingham is the author of his own punishment: "This, this All Souls’ day to my fearful soul/ Is the determined respite of my wrongs./ That high All-seer which
I dallied with/ Hath turned my feignéd prayer on my head/ And given in earnest what I begged in jest./ Thus doth he force the swords of wicked men/ To turn their own points in their masters' bosoms” (V.i.13–29; II.i.29–40). Anne, Clarence, Rivers, Grey, Vaughan, Hastings, and Buckingham die cursing themselves for their fate (cf. I.iii.318). Robbed of their dignity, their death is no tragedy. “Richard’s victims are first made into fools, and then into corpses” to the delight of his audience, and in accord with everyone’s sense of justice, including that of his victims (Jaffa, “The Unity of Tragedy,” p. 287).

Some critics have called Richard an “avenging angel,” a “scourge of God,” an “angel with horns.” But Richard is no angel. He has no regard for justice, and unlike everyone else in the play, no desire for vengeance. Incapable of anger, he feigns moral indignation whenever it suits his purpose (I.iii.42–81; II.i.79–82; IV.i.27–31). His conduct is dictated by cold, calculating reason, by the necessities imposed upon him by his desire to be king (I.ii.229;II.i.140; II.148–50; III.i.94, 158–93; vi; IV.ii.5–23, 49–61; iv.294–496; 3 Henry VI, V.vi.84; vii.31–34). Hastings and Buckingham are unjust, but it is not their injustice (their injustice was useful to Richard), but their scruples which cost them their favor. Hastings is executed because he will not countenance the de-thronement of Edward IV’s children: “I’ll have this crown of mine cut from my shoulders/ Before I’ll see the crown so foul misplaced” (III.i.38–55). Buckingham’s fall from grace begins when he balks at arranging the murder of Richard’s nephews: “High-reaching Buckingham grows circumspect” (IV.ii.5–31).

Richard never curses anyone in earnest (I.iii.58), perhaps because he is the only one who blames nature for his misfortunes. He is too ugly, or so he assumes, to be worthy of anyone’s love (e.g., IV.iii.47–57; cf. King Lear, I.i). Richard “loves no one, trusts no one, strange to say, hates no one, but uses all” (E. B. Warner, quoted in Furness, p. 15, emphasis added). He is amazed that Lady Anne should find him, though he himself cannot, “a marv’lous proper man” (I.ii.254). The target of his nephew’s barbs, he magnanimously applauds the young man’s wit:

Buckingham. Think you, my lord, this prating York
   Was not incenséd by his subtle mother
   To taunt and scorn you thus opprobriously?

Richard. No doubt, no doubt. O, ’tis a parlous boy,
   Bold, quick, ingenious, forward, capable:
   He is all the mother’s, from the top to toe.
   (III.i.151–56)

Richard is a devil, albeit one more apt to arouse our admiration than our hatred (A. W. Schlegel, quoted in Furness, p. 15; Richardson, quoted in Furness, p. 555; Bewley, quoted in Furness, p. 568). He is unbelievably ugly, but his physical deformity, the root of his worldly wisdom, candor, and good humor, is mitigated by his virtù (cf. Disc., I.55). Originally by virtue of the defects of
his body, and thereafter by virtue of the operation of his mind, he seems to stand outside the natural order of the universe. "I have no brother, I am like no brother;/ And this word "love," which graybeards call divine,/ Be resident in men like one another/ And not in me: I am myself alone" (3 Henry VI, V.vi.80–83). He loves no one. His family means nothing to him, and unlike Bolingbroke and Macbeth he has no desire to be a father and founder of a political dynasty. He has no friends; there is "absolutely no soul in whom Richard could confide."13 He treats everyone and everything, including himself, "without any respect" (cf. Disc., I.preface). He is incapable of reverence, and therefore shameless. Nothing is holy to him. There is no principle he will not betray, no trust he will not violate, no human being he will not sacrifice should the necessity to do so arise. The lines nature and piety would have us draw between public and private, friend and foe, kinsman and stranger are blurred by Richard's Machiavellianism. Its unit of currency is the individual, while the communities and associations to which he belongs are derivative and of secondary importance.

One cannot speak of Richard's nature, because he has none. His being is art, and art alone (Strong, pp. 205, 213–14). As an actor, he is, so to speak, always on stage, and strangely, never more so than in his soliloquies (H.N. Hudson, quoted in Furness, p. 565). His twelve soliloquies and four asides, constituting nearly five per cent of the play, testify to his isolation as a human being. "Richard is the quintessential individualist" (Jaffa, "The Unity of Tragedy," p. 287; see also Strong, pp. 213–14). He is truly uno solo, but an uno solo who by virtue of his isolation dominates every scene whether or not he is physically present (the phrase is Machiavelli's, see Disc., I.9). As it is, Richard appears in 14 of the play's 25 scenes, delivering 32 per cent of its lines.14

His birth is unnatural, and his misshapen body the original provocation for his war against nature (I.i.20–27; II.iv.127–28; IV.iv.49; 3 Henry VI, III.ii.153–62) (Strong, pp. 194–95; cf. Disc., I.1–3 on the insufficiency of nature). In Richard's case, nature dissembled by providing him with a body incommensurate with his spirit. Sent into the world "scarce half made up" (Soulless? Cf. Strauss, p. 31), Richard finds himself surrounded by men and especially women for whom the body—or more generally, appearances—are everything. "Men in general judge more by their eyes than by their hands. . . . Everyone sees how you appear, few touch what you are; . . . For the vulgar are taken in by the appearance and outcome of a thing, and in the world there is no one but the vulgar" (Prince, ch. 18). Everyone in Richard's world is vulgar. In their own way, the victims of his deceits are even uglier than he. They are shallow and vain, their souls too simple and plain to sustain his admiration for long (I.i.118; iii.327–28). "He entertains at bottom a contempt for all mankind, for he is confident of his ability to deceive them whether as his adversaries or his instruments" (Schlegel, quoted in Furness, p. 584).

We cannot help laughing when Clarence chastises his murderers for speaking ill of his brother: "O do not slander him, for he is kind" (I.iv.226–46).
“With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes/ The bleeding witness of my hatred by’ (I.ii.233–34; IV.i.65–80), Lady Anne succumbs to Richard’s profession of love and penitence. Hastings, despite mounting evidence of Richard’s duplicity, absurdly exclaims on the eve of his own execution that “there’s never a man in Christendom/ Can lesser hide his love or hate than he,/ For by his face straight shall you know his heart” (III.iv.48–53). To Richard, the world is a stage and the actor is king. “Why I can smile, and murder whilsts I smile,/ And cry ‘Content’ to that which grieves my heart,/ And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,/ And frame my face to all occasions” (3 Henry VI, III.ii.182–85; Richard III, I.iii.47–53). Armed with “honey words” to mask his “deep intent,” Richard knows how to seem a saint when most he plays the devil (I.iii.337; IV.i.79). His ugliness and reputation for villainy—handicaps which were it not for Richard’s (and Machiavelli’s?) example might seem insuperable—are nothing to him because he knows it is not virtue, but virtù, the appearance of virtue, that matters (II.ii.27–28; III.v.29; cf. Prince, ch. 15).

“Names” and “name-calling” are integral to the action of the play. George, Duke of Clarence, is arrested because his name begins with “G.” Edward (Prince of Wales), Henry VI, Clarence, Edward V, and Richard (Duke of York) are murdered, and Anne and the younger Elizabeth are courted and married because their surname might give them or their husbands the right to lay claim to the throne. Queen Margaret, having no arms she can call her own, is reduced to cursing and name-calling. Her admonition to “take heed of yonder dog,. . . when he fawns, he bites,” is ignored, because even her insults are useful to Richard. He is the first to acknowledge the extent of Margaret’s suffering, and the first to publicly repent the wrongs he has done her, thereby giving his enemy, Lord Rivers, cause to commend him for his moral virtue: “A virtuous and Christianlike conclusion/ To pray for them that have done scathe to us” (I.iii.216–337). Later, Richard stands between two churchmen with a prayer book in his hand so that the Lord Mayor of London will call him pious (III.vi.98–100; vii.46–47).

A vicious man may appear virtuous provided that he is sufficiently artful (III.i.7–15). This is so, because to determine the morality of a deed, the author’s motive or intention must always be considered. To be moral, one must not only do what is right, but one must do “it for the right reason or for the love of God” (Mansfield, “Introduction,” pp. x–xi). All morality then presupposes a “profession of good” (Prince, ch. 15). It is Richard’s awareness of the primacy of speech, and especially his own speech, which allows him to seem a saint when most he plays the devil. Baffled by the impossibility of discerning Richard’s heart, Anne wonders whether or not to take him at his word: “I would I knew thy heart./ Tis figured in my tongue” (I.ii.192–93). Machiavelli’s best disciples are known less by their prowess on the battlefield than by their skill in waging war with their tongues, by their ability to manipulate the criteria by which praise and blame are assigned (see Prince, chs. 15 and 18).
In the *Prince* and the *Discourses*, Machiavelli redefines virtue and vice, treating tyranny under the rubric of a new and more favorable name so that men will learn *how* to be not good, how to excuse behavior which were it not for Machiavelli’s instruction would otherwise be condemned. When Clarence tells Richard the cause of his arrest—“Because my name is George”—Richard suggests that Clarence be “new christ’ned” (I.i.46, 50; cf. *Prince*, chs. 15–17; *Disc.*, I.25–27). Redemption through new christening may be accomplished in one of two ways: by reinterpreting the accused’s motive (*Disc.*, I.9, 18, 29); or by feigning subjection to some necessity to conceal one’s strength and the exercise of one’s will (*Prince*, ch. 15; *Disc.*, I.10, 17 and 29). A new prince ought to govern his subjects indirectly (*Prince*, ch. 3; I.iii.329–34; iv.221; IV.iv.225–26). Machiavelli prefers the word “executive.” An executive is a prince who appears in the guise of a servant ostensibly ministering to the needs of others with little or no regard for himself. The greatest prince is the one whose rule is most indirect and invisible, that of Machiavelli himself, a prince who graciously offers to serve others by teaching them how to acquire and maintain states of their own (cf. *Prince*, ch. 11).

Richard begins his ascent with a descent, by humbling himself before his beloved in order to disguise his own selfish ambition (I.i.76–80; ii.127–30; iii.124; II.i.74; III.i.132–35; vii.17, 153–63, 204; IV.iv.336; cf. *Disc.*, I.1.13). Officially, he is not a ruler, but a “poor devoted servant” (I.ii.206; iii.121–24; IV.iv.355; cf. *Prince*, Epistle Dedicatory, and ch. 6’s reference to Moses as a “mere executive”). Since a profession of love is a tacit admission of weakness, incompleteness, and inferiority, the lover is necessarily and logically subordinate to his beloved. His love invests her with the opportunity and the right to rule, to dictate so to speak the terms of his surrender. This hierarchy of authority, however, is reversed when the prince merely impersonates a lover. By placing his beloved on a pedestal, by elevating her to a position of honor, the relative status of both parties is radically altered. Since the lover is free to withdraw his affection and proclaim his subjection to another as soon as it is to his advantage to do so, his beloved, especially if she is proud of the stature conferred by her lover’s profession of love, is more dependent upon him than he is on her. Professions of love are difficult to resist, because it is “a quarrel most unnatural to be revenged on him that loveth thee” (I.ii.134), and because we want to be admired. Professions of love appeal to our vanity and our self-esteem (cf. *Prince*, ch. 23). Richard is impervious to flattery, because he is consumed by self-contempt. The reason he “cannot prove a lover” (I.1.28) is not his physical deformity (he is not unloved), but his conviction that anyone who loves him is a fool.

Richard’s “love” impoverishes his beloveds by robbing them of their dignity. Their dignity is diminished as soon as they succumb to Richard’s rhetoric, not merely in Richard’s eyes, but also in the eyes of his audience. The recipients of Machiavelli’s favor are similarly impoverished. His exaltation of the
state is accomplished by means of argument which reduces the political community to a gang of pirates. His use of stato is never impersonal; patriotism is devotion to someone’s state, one’s own or somebody else’s. It is either selfishness or foolishness, depending upon whether or not one happens to be a member of the ruling class (cf. Florentine Histories, III.13). The state is no longer an association dedicated to virtue and the common good, but a vehicle for the expression and satisfaction of a subtler, more insidious, and potent form of human selfishness.

Machiavelli is eager to show men less gifted than he how to satisfy their selfish ambitions. Rarely, if ever, do his disciples notice the price they pay in return for his assistance. A Machiavellian prince governs his subjects indirectly, under the cover of a profession of love in order to disguise his authority and facilitate attribution of his “sins” to his solicitude for their welfare (I.ii.38–39; cf. Prince, ch. 26; Disc., III.41). To govern in this way, a prince must first divest himself of pride, lest he take for granted his right to rule and claim by right what can only be his “by force or by fraud” (Florentine Histories, III.13). Natural right is absent from Machiavelli’s political science, because no one has a right to rule over others by virtue of his nature; a prince, if he wishes to maintain himself, must not only be bad, he must know how to be bad; he must be devoid of reverence and psychologically prepared to woo his subjects (Disc., 1.27). It is no accident that Richard’s greatest accomplishment, his most memorable and Machiavellian moment, is the wooing of Lady Anne. (On the wooing of Fortuna, see Prince, ch. 25.)

Edward, Prince of Wales (Anne’s husband), was killed at the battle of Tewkesbury in 1471. His father, Henry VI, died of unknown causes while imprisoned in the Tower of London that same year. In 1474, Richard married Anne. Shakespeare exaggerates Richard’s villainy so that he might dazzle us with the power of Machiavellian virtù. In 3 Henry VI and Richard III, the historical sequence of events is compressed so that the murder of Anne’s husband and her father-in-law and Richard’s proposal of marriage occur within days of one another. (On the necessity of committing all of one’s cruelties “at one stroke,” see Prince, ch. 8.) In 3 Henry VI, Edward IV, followed by Richard, and then Clarence stab Anne’s Edward, their insolent and unarmed prisoner after the battle is over (V.v.38–40). Richard, acting on his own initiative, then hurries off to the Tower to murder King Henry VI (3 Henry VI, V.v.46–50; vi.56–67). “[U]nder what seem wantonly unfavorable circumstances,” during the burial procession of Henry VI, Richard proposes marriage to Lady Anne. The scene is so wildly implausible that it is usually considered “an unplayable strain on credulity”; perhaps, but it is also a tour de force so dauntless that the audience is stunned and stupefied (I.ii.44–45; cf. Prince, ch. 7).

Was ever woman in this humor wooed?
Was every woman in this humor won?
I'll have her, but I will not keep her long.
What! I that killed her husband and his father
To take her in her heart's extremest hate
With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes
The bleeding witness of my hatred by
Having God, her conscience, and these bars against me,
And I no friends to back my suit at all
But the plain devil and dissembling looks,
And yet to win her, all the world to nothing!
(I.ii.227–37)

When Richard accosts Anne, she is overcome by grief and thirsting for revenge. "Curséd be the heart that had the heart to do it!/ Curséd be the blood that let this blood from hence!" (I.ii.14–15). Richard is evil incarnate, a “black magician,” a “dreadful minister of hell,” a “lump of foul deformity,” a beast who knows no “touch of pity,” a “diffused infection of a man” who is “foulener than heart can think thee,” and a “devilish slave” (see also I.iii.229). There is nothing Richard can say, and but one thing he can do to excuse his conduct: “Thou canst make no excuse current but to hang thyself” (I.ii.84).

Richard needs to marry Edward’s widow in order to strengthen his claim to the throne (I.i.58–59). But why would someone as clever as Richard choose this particular moment to ask for Anne’s hand in marriage? Would it not have been more prudent to wait a while to allow Anne’s grief time to subside? The historical Richard waited three years. Only a fool would choose a moment as inauspicious as this to proclaim his love, and yet, Richard’s “madness” is more Machiavellian than it seems. The timing of Richard’s proposal is a stroke of genius. To win Anne’s heart, Richard must find a way to dispel her suspicions. Richard is a clever villain, but his reputation for cleverness is a handicap, a handicap he cleverly exploits. By imprudently asking for Anne’s hand when her hatred of him is at its zenith, Richard looks like a man so blinded by love that he is incapable of thinking clearly. He masquerades as the perfect Christian, overlooking Anne’s insults, and rendering “good for bad, blessings for curses” (I.ii.69; iii.334). To Richard, Anne is a “sweet saint,” an “angel . . . fairer than tongue can name thee” whose beauty haunted him even in his sleep.

If thy revengeful heart cannot forgive,
Lo, here I lend thee this sharp-pointed sword;
Which if thou please to hide in this true breast
And let the soul forth that adoreth thee,
I lay it naked to the deadly stroke
And humbly beg the death upon my knee.
(I.ii.173–78)

But Richard must do more than convince Anne of his sincerity; he must also acquit himself of his “supposèd crimes.” But how? Richard blames Anne for
his conduct (cf. *Prince*, ch. 18; *Disc.*, I.29; *Florentine Histories*, III.13). He disclaims responsibility for Edward’s death, but Anne knows better: “In thy foul throat thou li’st! Queen Margaret saw/ Thy murdr’rous falchion smoking in his blood” (I.ii.93–94). He compounds his dilemma by answering Anne’s question, “Didst thou not kill this king?” (I.ii.101), affirmatively. Undaunted, Richard asks Anne a question of his own, a question which leads to another, that of motive, which he alone can answer: “Is not the causer of the timeless deaths/ Of these Plantagenets, Henry and Edward,/ As blameful as the executioner?” (I.ii.117–19).

The distinction Richard makes between cause and effect catches Anne by surprise: “Thou wast the cause and the most cursed effect” (I.ii.120). The plausibility of Richard’s assertion to the contrary—“Your beauty was the cause of that effect” (I.ii.121)—is enhanced by the timing of his marriage proposal. Having already condemned Richard for his “heinous deeds,” Anne must now reconsider her verdict in the light of his motive. To her dismay, she discovers that she cannot condemn Richard without condemning herself as well. If Richard is a murderer, then she is his unwitting accomplice. Haunted by Anne’s beauty, Richard would have undertaken “the death of the whole world” in order “to live one hour in [her] sweet bosom” (I.ii.123–24). Anne of course is no more liable for her “heavenly face” than Richard for his physical deformity, but she believes otherwise: “If I thought that, . . . These nails should rend that beauty from my cheeks” (I.ii.125–26; cf. IV.iv.216–18).

Richard’s descent, his profession of love, reverses everything. Her wretchedness pales in comparison with his. Anne is his day and his life (I.ii.130), his ruler, and his accessory, however inadvertently, to the deaths of “these Plantagenets, Henry and Edward.”

Richard. Thine eyes, sweet lady, have infected mine.
Anne. Would they were basilisks to strike thee dead!
Richard. I would they were, that I might die at once;
For now they kill me with a living death. (I.ii.149–52)

Prior to Richard’s profession of love, Anne could do nothing but shake her fist in impotent rage and pray for divine vengeance, but now, Richard offers her the opportunity to punish him herself.

Richard. Then bid me kill myself, and I will do it.
Anne. I have already.
Richard. That was in thy rage.
   Speak it again, and even with the word
   This hand, which for thy love did kill thy love,
   Shall for thy love kill a far truer love,
   To both their deaths shalt thou be accessory. (I.ii.186–91)

Richard’s descent is Anne’s undoing. She cannot bring herself to execute Richard or bid him to commit suicide. Already an accessory to two murders, she is
reluctant to become an accessory to yet a third (I.ii.185). But having declined to punish Richard, she no longer has the right to ask God to revenge Henry’s death or to stand fast by her belief that Richard “canst make no excuse current but to hang [him]self.” Eager to “make the wench amends” by becoming “her husband and her father,” Anne can hardly say no to the man who purged her of her grief and “help[ed her] to a better husband” (I. i.155–56; I. ii.138–44). A moment ago, Richard was a “villain” who “know’st nor law of God or man,” but now Anne consents to accept his ring, and gladly grants the boon he asks of her, to allow “him who hath most cause to be a mourner” to oversee the interment of “this noble king” (I.ii.70) (Cf. The account of this scene in Strong, pp. 206–8). Her joy at seeing Richard “become so penitent” is exceeded only by his at the success of his performance: “And will she yet abase her eyes on me... On me, whose all not equals Edward’s moi’ty” (I.ii.210–20, 246–50).

Richard appears both here and elsewhere as an executive, seemingly acting in concert with others and at their behest in order to diffuse responsibility for his actions and disguise his ambition to be king (I.i.63–65, 106; iii.89–90, 173–80, 323–30; iv.171; II.ii.21, 151–54). When Richard finally accepts the crown, he claims to do so “against [his] conscience and [his] soul,” reluctantly sacrificing his will to that of his countrymen (III.vii.140–72, 203–25, 230–35). Richard may “want love’s majesty” (I.i.16), but his ugliness does not prevent him from impersonating a lover and feigning subjection to the will of his beloved.

A magnanimous man is too proud of his superiority in virtue to demean himself before his inferiors, and too contemptuous of honor to stoop to chicanery and flattery to secure that honor which is his by right and which cannot be justly refused (Jaffa, “The Unity of Tragedy,” p. 288). Yet the honor due to the virtuous is often withheld. To Richard, the untimely demise of Edward, Henry VI, and Clarence, whose virtues are superior to his, is proof that the earth is no proper home for the practice of moral virtue (I.i.118–20; ii.104–8, 239–45; III.i.79, 94). Richard’s conclusion is reminiscent of Machiavelli’s declaration in the fifteenth chapter of The Prince that he “who wants to make a profession of good in all things must come to ruin among so many who are not good.” Lest we condemn Richard too harshly for the murder of his nephews, it should be noted that were it not for “Richard III’s desperate attempts to gather the varied strands of legitimacy to himself... the cycle of rebellion and misrule that... plagued England for a hundred years” would have continued. Richard needs to “murder [Elizabeth’s] brothers and then marry her” not only “to stop all hopes whose growth may damage” him, but also to bring peace to England (IV.ii.57–61; iv.471–72). Richmond obviously agrees. He marries Elizabeth to unite “the true succeeders” of the houses of York and Lancaster to put an end to England’s “civil wounds.” Richmond’s conduct is equally determined by political necessity, and not love, although Richmond is somewhat more honest about it than Richard (IV.iii.40–42; iv.256, 343, 416; V.v.29–40).
There is another and more disturbing parallel. Shortly before his death, Clarence asks God to spare his “guiltless wife” and his “poor children” (I.iv.72). Richard spares them, but only because they pose no threat to his reign: “Inquire of their fate—Whom I will marry straight to Clarence’s daughter./ The boy is foolish and I fear him not” (IV.ii.52–54; iii.36–37; iv.145–46). When Clarence’s children appear on stage to bewail their fate—“What stay had we but Clarence? And he’s gone” (II.ii.75)—it seems to be a dramatic device for intensifying our hatred of Richard by showing us the innocent victims of his tyranny. But the presence of Clarence’s children on stage simultaneously casts a dark shadow over Richmond’s subsequent assertion of moral superiority (V.iii.241–72). An Elizabethan audience would have known that Clarence’s “last prayer had not been answered, for the destruction of his wife and children by Henry VII and Henry VIII, who feared their possible claims to the throne, was an oft-told tale.”22 Clarence’s wife and children were “foes to [their] rest and [their] sweet-sleep’s disturbers,” and therefore beheaded lest their kingdom stand “on brittle glass” (IV.ii.60, 72).

Margaret (see 3 Henry VI, I.iv.79–180; I.iii.173–86), Edward IV, Clarence, Richard, Rivers, Vaughan, Grey, Hastings, and Buckingham were no innocents. None of them is free of sin (II.iii.27–28). The same, of course, might be said (and is said by Shakespeare, albeit more subtly) of Henry VII and Henry VIII. Were it not for his soliloquies, Richard’s conduct might seem no worse than theirs (Strong, p. 201). With the possible exception of Margaret and Henry VII, of whom nothing is explicitly said, everyone in Richard III suffers from a guilty conscience, even the allegedly conscienceless Richard (IV.i.82–84; V.iii.73–74, 119–223).

Is Richmond’s victory a refutation of Machiavellianism? Or does Richard fail because in the end, his Machiavellianism is inferior to Richmond’s? In his oration to his soldiers, Richmond’s affirmation of the justice of their “good cause” is capped by an appeal to his soldiers’ greed. Richard’s soldiers, despite their numerical superiority, need cheering up, but Richard is inexcusably silent about the justice of their cause, dwelling instead upon the inferiority of their enemies—“Remember whom you are to cope withal,/ A sort of vagabonds, rascals, and runaways/ A scum of Britains and base lackey peasants”—and his soldiers’ fear for the safety of their “lands” and “beauteous wives.” Richard would have his soldiers believe that Richmond is a “paltry fellow” whose army consists of “overweening rags of France,” and “famished beggers, weary of their lives,/ Who, but for dreaming on this fond exploit,/ . . . had hanged themselves.” Had Richard prevailed, his victory would have brought him no glory, a victory over these “poor rats” merits no commendation, and yet he needs “to carry on some great enterprises and to give rare examples of himself” (the phrase is Machiavelli’s, see Prince, ch. 21) to mask his own injustice. His use of fear to strengthen his soldiers’ resolve is foolish, for as Richmond shrewdly observes, “Richard except, those whom we fight against/ Had rather
have us win than him they follow” (V.iii.11, 238–72, 315–42). Richard is successful when he conceals his selfishness beneath a plausible profession of love, but he fails miserably whenever he is compelled to rely upon naked fear, fear unadorned by love or deceit (IV.iv.494–96; V.iii.343–45).²⁸

Machiavelli’s teaching is easily and frequently misunderstood; his object is not the resurrection of spiritedness, but rather the manipulation of love, and professions of love. A Machiavellian prince governs not by impressing others with his moral virtues, but through a blend of humility and audacity intended to leave his subjects satisfied and stupefied, or rather, grateful and fearful. Neither Machiavelli nor his pupils can afford to be spirited or angry, lest they come to demand by right what can only be theirs by force or fraud. It is no accident that Machiavelli is the author of three comedies (The Woman from Andros, Clizia, and Mandragola), and no tragedies, and that in each of his three plays the object is to overcome the obstacles which stand in the way of the union of a man and a woman.

Richard has no difficulty deceiving the nobility and the Lord Mayor of London, but his rhetoric is ineffectual with the multitude, because his strategy for wooing the many is not at all Machiavellian (II.iii; III.v.75–94; vii.1–42). Richard asks Buckingham when he speaks to the multitude to “infer the bastardy” of both Edward IV and his children, and “urge his hateful luxury/ And bestial appetite in change of lust” (III.v.80–81). Does Richard honestly believe that a few allusions to Edward IV’s “vices,” his nephews’ bastardy, and his own “superior” lineage will persuade the multitude to demand his coronation instead of his nephews (II.iii.8–15)? It is absurd for Richard to advance his claim to the throne on the basis of his “form and nobleness of mind,” his “discipline in war, wisdom in peace,” his “bounty, virtue, [and] fair humility” (III.v.14–17). Richard has never done anything, at least so far as we know, to curry favor with the multitude (cf. the account of Caesar’s liberality in Prince, ch. 16).

Richard’s approach to foreign policy is also contrary to Machiavelli’s teaching. Unlike Henry V and the young Edward V, Richard has no imperial or Caesarean ambitions (Frisch, pp. 2–4). Henry V went to war with France to disguise the illegitimacy of his title to the throne, but Richard is strangely content to be king of England, and of nothing else (2 Henry IV, IV.v.213–14).²⁹ The villain who rejects Edward IV’s peace because he “hate[s] the idle pleasures of these days” is the author of a conspiracy whose goal is ironically the creation of a more profound and enduring peace than the one he spurns. If Richard had had his way, there would have been no one left to contest his right to be king: “What heir of York is there alive but we?/ And who is England’s king, but great York’s heir” (IV.iv.471–72)? What Richard does not seem to realize is that Richmond has as much right to wrest the crown from him, if he can, as Richard had to wrest it from his nephews. A Machiavellian prince has no right to take his legitimacy for granted.
Edward V, assuming he meant what he said to Buckingham about his desire, once he becomes a man, to go to war to “win our ancient right in France again,” has no more regard for peace and justice than Richard (III.i.69–93) (Bloom with Jaffa, pp. 113–14; Alvis, pp. 109–12). I rather doubt that Shakespeare would have approved of Edward V’s ambition to emulate the tyrant Caesar. It is no accident that Richard III literally begins with a celebration of peace, albeit by a man contemptuous of the virtues of peace, and ends with Richmond’s prayer that peace “may long live here, God say amen!”

In Richard III, Shakespeare gives us cause to wonder whether Richard’s tyranny would have been possible without Christianity, and whether Christianity might not itself stand in the way of England’s peace and happiness. The science of indirect government as expounded and practiced by Machiavelli is inspired by his reflections upon the Christian conquest and governance of Rome. The priest rules over monarch and subject alike, but in the name of God, or as Machiavelli intimates, by feigning submission to the will of God in order to conceal his own rule. Similarly, Richard is most successful when he governs his subjects under the cover of a profession of love and subjection to the will of his beloveds.

Richard whets Derby, Hastings, and Buckingham’s appetite for revenge against the Queen’s brethren, but then sighs, and “with a piece of Scripture/ Tells them that God bids us do good for evil” (I.iii.328–34). Is not Christianity guilty of doing the same thing? Does it not command charity as it indulges and whets our appetite for vengeance? Time and again, the victims of injustice in Richard III implore God to avenge their injury, not merely in the next world, but also here on earth. To Richard, the murder of Henry VI and Edward is an act of divine vengeance so that, in truth, it is “God, not we, [who] hath plagued thy bloody deed” (I.iii.173–80, 185). Although Christian doctrine teaches that “If God will be avengèd for the deed,/ O, know you yet he doth it publicly./ Take not the quarrel from his pow’rful arm,/ He needs no indirect or lawless course/ To cut off those that have offended him,” its doctrine of divine providence offers cover to those who undertake on their own initiative the punishment of their enemies (I.iv.218–22). Richmond does not ask for divine authorization to assemble an army and set sail for England, waiting instead until the eve of his battle with Richard to pray that God “make us thy ministers of chastisement,” because his ambition to be king is sufficiently compelling (V.iii.114).

The doctrine of divine providence is a godsend to ambitious men. Or as Machiavelli puts it, “let a prince win and maintain his state: the means will always be judged honorable, and will be praised by everyone” (Prince, ch. 18). The ordinary citizens in Richard III are too mindful of Christianity’s injunction to “leave it all to God” to exercise a salutary restraint upon the conduct of the nobility, and the nobility is too ambitious to restrain itself (II.iii). Since each of God’s “ministers” is himself in need of chastisement, a moral justification for
selfish ambition and vengeance against one's enemies is never lacking, leaving the state always on the verge of civil war.

I am inclined to think that Brackenbury is speaking for Shakespeare when he observes that,

Princes have but their titles for their glories,
An outward honor for an inward toil,
And for unfelt imaginations.
They often feel a world of restless cares;
So that between their titles and low name
There's nothing differs but the outward fame. (I.iv.78–83)

If so, then contrary to Machiavelli, the most important lesson of Shakespeare's *Richard III* is the insufficiency of glory, and by implication, the superiority of private life (Disc., III.2; cf. Plato's *Republic*, 620c–d).

NOTES

5. Cf. *Prince*, ch. 12, on good arms and good laws, and Disc., III.6, where conscience is defined as "confusion of the brain."
6. Cf. Mansfield, "Introduction" to *The Prince*, p. 10; Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969), p. 292: "In Machiavelli we find comedies, parodies, and satires but nothing reminding of tragedy. There is no tragedy in Machiavelli because he has no sense of the sacredness of 'the common.'"
8. Justice is no great theme for Machiavelli either; see Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, p. 295.
12. Cf. *Prince*, ch. 3 on the wisdom of the Romans, ch. 4 on the necessity of eliminating the bloodline of the previous monarch, and Disc., III.2 on the insufficiency of private life.


15. On the piety of the ordinary citizen, see II.iii where the word “God” appears seven times in forty-seven lines; cf. Prince, ch. 18, on the need to appear religious.


19. See, for example, III.v.24–32; cf. the account of Lady Fortuna and her suitors in Mansfield, “Introduction,” p. xxiv.


25. Cf. the reference to Callimaco as Lucrezia’s father in Mandragola, V.iv.

26. Strong, p. 201. See also II.iii.30 where England is called a “sickly land,” and V.v.15–41 where she is said to have “long been mad and scarred herself.”


28. On how love and fear may be combined according to Machiavelli, see Orwin, pp. 1224–1226.


Shakespeare’s Richard III and the Soul of the Tyrant

MORTON J. FRISCH
Northern Illinois University

Caesar’s many successes . . . did not divert his natural spirit of enterprise and ambition to the enjoyment of what he had laboriously achieved, but served as fuel and incentive for future achievements, and begat in him plans for greater deeds and a passion for fresh glory, as though he had used up what he already had. What he felt was therefore nothing else than emulation of himself, as if he had been another man, and a sort of rivalry between what he had done and what he purposed to do.

Plutarch, Caesar, LVIII.3.

Shakespeare’s Richard III differs from the tyrant Socrates describes in Plato’s Republic in that he has an attractive quality about him, attractive in the sense of fascinating. There is something in the character of Richard which cannot fail to attract us almost against our will, which is all the more incredible since Richard from the outset is “determined to prove a villain” (1.1.30). The wonderfully versatile power of his mind, his talent for equivocation and ambiguity are objects of sheer fascination. Shakespeare has performed the extraordinary feat of presenting the serpentine wisdom of the tyrannic soul in such a way that it cannot fail to excite our sensibilities. In the satisfaction we receive in contemplating the character of Richard, in the various situations in which Shakespeare has shown him, it is almost as if we lose sight of the cold-blooded, calculating tyrant whose ugly soul is overshadowed and even to some extent obscured by the marvelous play of his intellect. But whatever plausible appeal Richard may have had because of the brilliant qualities of his mind dissipates when he orchestrates the murder of his young nephews.

Shakespeare delineates the character of the tyrannic soul in his characterization of Richard III in a more direct way than the Platonic dialogue does, for here we see the tyrant in action. Shakespeare was able to write a play in which the tyrannic soul becomes a reality rather than something which is merely the subject of conversation. The tyrant as an idea is a perfect example of limitless self-love. Richard prides himself most on his ability to deceive, to dissemble, although he is not nearly as effective on this score as he has led himself to believe. He conceives of himself, in the third part of Henry VI, the play which precedes this one, as someone who can prove his superiority to Machiavelli, who can accomplish feats which no one else would even attempt, so much so that the impossible becomes plausible (3 Henry VI III.ii.193). It seems reasonable to assume that Richard is not ignorant of the fact that Machiavelli, who
teaches rather than practices the tyrannical art, the art of deception, is more capable of dissimulation than others and therefore must be regarded as a most serious competitor for the tyrant. Richard’s willingness to take on Machiavelli can therefore be understood as a challenge to the philosopher’s reputed superior knowledge of political practice.

It is only too clear that the consciousness of power attending the working out of Richard’s schemes is the inexorable guide of his political existence. He is driven by the restless desire of power after power, but the pleasure for him is in the pursuit rather than the mere possession of power. He is less attracted to kingship by the prospect of achieving anything with the kingship than by the exciting problems anticipated for its acquisition. Perhaps the most revealing confrontation in the entire play is that between Richard and the young Prince Edward. Edward, when he learns that he along with his younger brother is being sent to the Tower of London, indicates his unpleasant feelings about that place and asks whether Caesar had built it. He remarks, almost as an aside, that Caesar’s fame has outlived his death and that death therefore makes no conquest of this conqueror (III.i.68–69, 87–88). It is obvious what the praise of Caesar implies. Caesar appears to be a model for Edward, and by bringing in Caesar, Edward introduces the thought of loftier motives than kingship or kingly power to someone whose soul has been consumed in his passion for securing the kingship. The problem for Richard is that his passion for power has nothing further to satisfy itself once he secures the throne. Richard is not like Caesar. He has no grand vision of empire as Caesar had. He even has no interest in regaining territories in France lost by his brother’s predecessor on the throne, Henry VI. But Edward says that, if he lives long enough to be king, he will recover England’s ancient right in France again (III.i.91–92).

There is certainly no reason for thinking that Richard would have been satisfied with performing the mundane tasks of rule upon receiving the crown. He was not unaware of the fact that “the golden yoke of sovereignty” imposes “a world of cares” and a “burden” on someone like himself who has little or no interest in assuming those cares and burdens (III.vii. 145, 222, 228). But nevertheless his action is animated by his obsession for securing the English crown which he looks upon as “the high imperial type of this earth’s glory” (IV.iv.245). It comes best into view in his remark that “what other pleasure can the world afford [than] to command, to check, to o’erbear? [Therefore] I’ll make my heaven to dream upon the crown” (3 Henry VI III.i.147, 166, 168). Prince Edward draws Richard’s attention to some larger motive than the passion for kingly power by alluding to Caesar’s grand vision of empire, thus moving from the petty end of Richard to the grand end of Caesar. But Richard does not leave further avenues for his lust for power beyond securing the kingship. No other pleasure comes nearer to divinity for him than this kind of pleasure. He does not have the vision to move on to greater goals.

The episode between Richard and the young Prince Edward needs further
elucidation. It is quite possible that Edward's statement about Caesar creates the shadow of a doubt in Richard's mind as to his inflated opinion of his own superiority. We sense something important about the fact that Richard does not hesitate to proclaim his superiority to Machiavelli, but not to Caesar. No difference between Richard and Caesar is more telling than that which is revealed in Richard's speech to his army before the final battle at Bosworth Field. He refers to "these bastard Bretons, whom our fathers have in their own land beaten, bobb'd, and thump'd, and, in record left them the heirs of shame," but never once does he consider the possibility of regaining England's lost territories in France (V.iii. 334–36). It is Edward's concentration on militaristic honor that leads him to emphasize a return to France. It is not impossible that Edward, after recovering England's lost territories in France, would have harbored hopes of conquering all of France, thus securing the union of France and England under the crown of England. He clearly has a vision which could easily transform itself into imperialism.

Edward is devoted to militaristic honor and hence to foreign war and conquest. He has presumably read Caesar's Commentaries, an account which, in his opinion, would make Caesar's fame immortal. He even goes so far as to suggest that it is the wit and wisdom encapsulated in those commentaries which make Caesar's valor live (III.i.86). Caesar's greatness will be admired and praised by many generations after his death. It goes without saying that Shakespeare made Richard III immortal, but Caesar made himself immortal first through his exploits and then through his commentaries. Caesar evidently wanted to be remembered long after his death. It is for this reason that he was constantly seeking to outdo his past accomplishments with greater and greater deeds, but the highest part of his greatness was his commentaries. His greatness is more spectacular because of his commentaries. Caesar did not need a Shakespeare to embellish his greatness. Richard receives his fame at the hands of Shakespeare, the fame of infamy, but an infamy which becomes a substitute for oblivion. The young Prince Edward's praise of Caesar makes Richard appear low.

The contrast between Richard and Caesar is perhaps nowhere more clearly seen than in reading Plutarch's characterization of Julius Caesar. Plutarch says that Caesar competed with himself to outdo himself, driven by his "plans for greater deeds [than he had already accomplished] and a passion for fresh glory, as though he had used up what he already had. What he felt was therefore nothing else than emulation of himself, as if he had been another man, and a sort of rivalry between what he had done and what he purposed to do" (Plutarch, Caesar, LVIII.3). Shakespeare's Richard, by way of contrast, means to prove himself to himself by overpowering others, but apparently lacks that further incentive to compete with himself, to outdo himself. He soliloquizes in order to assure himself of his own superiority. His recurrent soliloquies (with the exception of the last) can be construed therefore as exercises in self-assur-
ance in order to reinforce his sense of his own absolute worth. He is absolutely convinced in his own mind that he will be able to capture the English throne no matter how difficult that task might be, but altogether missing is the incentive or the will to compete with himself by establishing any further goals beyond that. The securing of the English throne somehow marks the limit of his aspirations. He lacks the incentive or the desire to set new goals for himself. He is constrained by the narrowness of his vision.

It is true that Richard thinks he can accomplish almost anything, but only within the narrow confines of maneuvering his way to the crown. He has no interest in the burdens of statecraft or the pursuit of empire. Richard gives us to understand that he has the power of going to any length in contriving anything, employing only speech, only persuasion (3 Henry VI III.ii.182–93). He accomplishes feats which no one else would even think of attempting, like wooing Lady Anne in the presence of the corpse of her murdered husband’s murdered father, both of whom he had admittedly murdered. Who would ever think that she could be maneuvered into the intolerable position of having to live with a second husband responsible for her first husband’s death? He glories in the sweetness of his triumph over Anne. But he overestimates his own abilities, for his deceitfulness and deviousness are rather transparent to those who know him well. He may be able to break down the walls of Anne’s restraint, but the former Queen Elizabeth is not taken in by the pretense of his profession of love for her daughter, the Princess Elizabeth. She feigns a reluctant acquiescence to his proposal of marriage to her daughter which has Richard convinced that he has won her support. It would be fair to assume that Richard deceives himself into thinking that Elizabeth is convinced of his sincerity. He appears to have no sense of his own limitations. He cannot see himself correctly.

Richard hardly ever lets his conscience get the better of him, but his conscience asserts itself in his sleep when the spirits of those he has murdered or arranged to have murdered appear to him in a dream. This cold, unmoving rock of a man, claiming as he does that he fears neither heaven nor hell, finally dissolves under the pressure of conscience, brought on by the burden of a troubled soul (V.iii.179–204). He claims that he is not touched by conscience, but the moment he is willing to admit that his “coward conscience” inspires him with fear, he does not seem to be the same Richard as before (V.iii.179). There is a decided difference in tone, for Richard is only Richard without a conscience. But even before this admittedly frightful encounter, Lady Anne, now his wife, reveals that she had never spent a restful night in his bed without being awakened by his frightful or timorous dreams (IV.i.82–84). We are left wondering whether he had had previous encounters with the conscience he scorned and despises in the timorous dreams which only his wife is able to bring to our attention. The former Queen Margaret, addressing Richard earlier in the play, prophesizes that “no sleep [will] close that deadly eye of thine unless it be while some tormenting dream affrights thee with a hell of ugly devils,” but we
are given no more information than that (I.iii.225–57). It seems not improbable at all that Richard is plagued nightly after Margaret’s curse by the tormenting dreams she prophesizes, for when contemplating the murder of the young princes, he refers to them as “foes to my rest and my sweet dream’s disturbers” (IV.i.72). What might have caused him to sleep uneasily was the anxiety brought about by his memory of the prophecies of Henry VI and a bard of Ireland that Richmond would be “likely in time to bless the regal throne” (3 Henry VI IV.vi.74), and that he would not live long after he saw Richmond (IV.i.94–96, 104–5).

Richard successfully conceals his nightmares for a long time. He rarely mentions his troubling dreams prior to the one nightmare which almost completely unnerves him. One may surmise that he suppresses them, but whatever one’s conclusion on that, it seems evident that he does not tell us everything that goes on in his thoughts. The dark shadow of guilt, dimly perceived in the deepest recesses of his soul, does not appear to surface until toward the end of the play. He does not have to face up to the horror of his catalogue of crimes until the visitation of the spirits of his victims at that time. He awakens to conscience only after he is cursed by the ghosts of his murdered victims.

Richard seems willing to acknowledge the power of conscience as he attempts to defy it, for in his remarks to his retinue made shortly after his dream, he says that “conscience is but a word which cowards use, devised at first to keep the strong in awe” (V.iii.310–11). He had never dreamed it possible that his conscience could get under his skin, but he is evidently intimidated by the power of conscience. By his own admission, he is at war with his conscience. Conscience is a diabolical enemy to be overcome. The action of the play moves between Richard’s announcement in the opening scene of his determination to prove himself a villain and the eventual realization, after the ghosts of those murdered ones appear to him in a dream, that he is a villain (V.iii.192). The promise that he made to himself to prove himself a villain, the desire for his own perfection as a villain, has been fulfilled. It is a moment of frightened self-awareness in which he confesses to himself that he hates himself for the hateful deeds he has committed (V.iii.190–91). He is stricken with remorse. He almost completely loses his presence of mind, crying to Jesus for mercy (V.iii.179). Richard, who refuses to recognize the existence of conscience, gives himself over to the terrible tortures of conscience, but one cannot say that he was restrained by conscience.

It can be shown that the love of honor is a possible remedy for the misuse of political power, for the desire for recognition makes it possible for rulers to perform selfless acts for selfish reasons; but it is not a sufficient corrective, since the appeal to honor must be perfected by being in the service of something far more exalted than honor. We are led to reflect on the possibility of Richard III becoming a beneficent tyrant, but there is absolutely no suggestion that he could have become that, inasmuch as he reveals a remarkable indif-
ference to honor and praise and therefore lacks the incentive to measure up to some standard of praise. He apparently has no need for recognition from others. It seems evident that there is no potential for goodness in Richard Plantagenet. It would be accurate to say that Shakespeare’s characterization of Richard goes a long way toward showing the impossibility of transforming the soul of the tyrant into something fine. One cannot fancy Shakespeare, from the standpoint from which he viewed the actions of the unjust tyrannical soul, holding the view that the correction of tyranny is possible through the conversion of the tyrant from badness to goodness. Shakespeare did not consider Richard perfectible, his last soliloquy notwithstanding.

Richard III is the only one of Shakespeare’s kings explicitly associated with Machiavelli. Machiavelli may not be Shakespeare’s model of a philosopher, but he is the only philosopher to whom Richard could conceivably relate. Richard knows without having to be reminded that he is not a philosopher in spite of his offer in 3 Henry VI to take Machiavelli to school. It can hardly be said that he is reflective. We obviously cannot take seriously Buckingham’s characterization of Richard as someone bent on meditation and contemplation in the interest of his soul rather than having an interest in worldly pursuits, for that is simply a ploy to feign a reluctance on Richard’s part to accept an offer of the crown (III.vii.72, 74, 76). It is not the contemplative life to which Richard turns. The most that we can expect from him in a reflective posture is that he derives delight from contemplating his shadow in the sun, his own projected image of himself (I.i.25–26; ii.267–68). The fact that he mentions Machiavelli does not prove that there is anything philosophic in him, but it should not surprise us that practitioners of politics are for the most part defective in theoretical understanding.

We are always confronted with tyrants and, incredible as it may seem, they continue to be a subject of peculiar fascination and attractiveness by virtue of their remarkable capacity for ruse and deception. Richard wishes to prove himself best, but only to his own satisfaction. He is not at all concerned with being admired or praised by others. Self-admiration or self-satisfaction does not have to be confirmed by the admiration of others, but without the acclaim of others, Richard can only prove himself best to himself by overpowering others. The intensity of his will to power is clearly manifested in his remark that, if the crown were further off than it is, he would still pluck it down, but more than that the very impossibility of the enterprise becomes a supreme challenge to him (3 Henry VI III.ii.194–95). It is hardly necessary to say that the work of the true statesman is to raise politics to its highest possible level, but Richard does not possess the moral equipment necessary to make Englishmen good citizens of England, inasmuch as he cannot be presumed to be guided by any concern with the common good. His statement that he is “unfit for state and majesty” is truer than he realizes (III.vii.204). This greatest of English tyrants attempts in Machiavellian fashion to set aside the moral order of the world
through a policy of ruse, treachery, and murder. His ruthless statesmanship, a calculated ruthlessness characteristic of Machiavelli, succeeds in acquiring kingly power, and in preserving it for so short a time, but his vow to outdo Machiavelli never comes to pass. It appears to be a vauntingly ambitious claim to a superiority which could not be achieved, for he has hardly been crowned before his house of cards begins to collapse. He cannot maintain the sovereignty he has so recently acquired (IV.ii.60–61). There is no indication that Richard could ever rule England.

Richard III is the most exclusively political of Shakespeare's history plays. The tragic history of Richard III is not simply the tragic history of England consumed in a civil war, the War of the Roses, England's greatest disaster, but an attempt to sharpen our sense of the potential for tragedy in political life through the depiction of the actions of an unjust tyrannical ruler. The murder of the young princes, a deed which is unqualifiedly evil, exceeds the greatest cruelties of the War of the Roses and shows how ugly or deformed a tyrant's soul can be. Shakespeare does not say so in so many words, but it would be reasonable to assume that he believed that the responsible exercise of political power, the rule of wisdom with its very strict standards, is seldom available to political society. The rule of wisdom is very difficult to achieve. Henry V represented England's finest hour, but in a very short time, the horror of the War of the Roses, culminating in the tyranny bred by these civil dissensions, and the resurrection of that regime out of the long madness that had scarred England, would be succeeded only by a future fraught with uncertainty. It would seem that the potentiality for absolute evil in human affairs is too great to expect a transformation of the harshness of political life.

There is simply no sufficient explanation for the villainy of Richard, inasmuch as he is not really interested in being burdened with the responsibilities of a sovereign. He proves indifferent to the responsibilities of power other than its retention. One would be hard pressed therefore to argue that his villainy derives mainly from his desire to reign as king. Richard is much more of a schemer than an opportunist. He has an irresistible impulse to manipulate. It would seem that villainy has become an end in itself, that is, that the means to an end which is not really an end has supplant the end and become an end in itself. It seems almost impossible to suppose that what Richard has in mind is simply to prove himself a villain, to live for nothing except the need to assert himself violently, unless of course it is intended as a test of his mettle. But there can be little doubt that Richard is much happier when he is seeking the throne than after he possesses it, for what gives him most pleasure is the expectation of a satisfaction which is always and essentially in the future rather than the reality of that satisfaction. We can say therefore that the pursuit is more enjoyable for him than the attainment of the end, but that enjoyment ceases once the object of the pursuit is obtained. It is not hard to understand that the motivation which had spurred Richard on to his course of action is no longer there once he
becomes king. Richard of Gloucester plotting to take the throne is in his element, but as king he is reduced to merely securing his position. He cannot enjoy his power.

But however we are to understand Richard’s motives, it is certainly most significant that, when he realizes that he is a villain, he is appalled at the very thought. The nightmare has now fully invaded his consciousness. In the most astounding of turnaboutes, he faces up to his own villainy in his monologue after his dream, but it is too late to seek his own salvation. Richard is what he is by virtue of the character of his actions. He does not have the means to correct himself. He defined himself with precision earlier on when he said, “I am in so far in blood that sin will pluck on sin” (IV.ii.63–64). He is imprisoned by his own treachery. His astonishing statement that he hates himself must be taken at its face value, although nothing in his previous experience can account for the sentiment he now experiences. He apparently does not like what he sees in himself. He is not even sure of his villain’s role any more. It almost borders on self-contempt. It certainly seems that his conscience takes the heart out of him, but it would be a gross overstatement to say that Richard is repentant. It would be more accurate to say that he is ambivalent, for he both affirms and denies his guilt virtually in the same breath.

Richard, for some reason that we never learn, blurts out that he hates himself for the hateful deeds he has committed. It is at first impossible to believe that one who is so apparently convinced of his own superiority would ever experience such a sudden change of attitude toward himself. We have no indication from any of his previous remarks that he ever entertained any misgivings concerning his conduct, but this in no sense implies that he did not harbor some silent doubts. Why should the mere appearance of apparitions in a dream induce him to change his estimate of himself, unless of course they were in fact conjured up by his own imagination in order to create a confrontation with himself? Richard might have intended to seek from such a confrontation an exoneration of his consciousness of his own guilt. By concealing, or leaving to inference, this side of Richard, Shakespeare leaves to be figured out the reasoning by which he led himself to think of himself as deeply immoral. His reasoning remains unknown to us, leaving us wondering what he had in mind. It is altogether possible that Shakespeare wanted to tell us that conscience is a force to be reckoned with in a conscience-ridden world, and that even someone as impervious to conscience as Richard cannot extricate himself altogether from that moral consciousness. We are confronted with a tyrant who, at least momentarily, is out of heart with tyranny, who has just declared that he hates himself for the hateful deeds he has committed. Shakespeare’s play shows that a tyrant who lacks both goodness and conscience, one could even say that goodness goes against his grain, nevertheless recognizes himself as a hateful creature, because he does not know how to be altogether evil.

Richard’s greatest passion as it appears is to manipulate or overpower
others. It hardly needs to be said that it is in the nature of the desire for power that it can never be fulfilled. The desire for power must feed upon more power. The pursuit can be satisfying only as long as the end recedes, and unless the end is continuously redefined, the pursuit will be over and the satisfaction will cease. Richard thought that he wanted to become king, but what he really wanted was to prove himself capable of becoming king. The effort is everything for him; the result is inconsequential. The pursuit of power or the tyrant’s activity has no end other than more power, which is precisely Richard’s problem. There is a certain reasonableness in Richard’s actions, inasmuch as it is not unreasonable for a prince of the realm to think in terms of his possible succession to the throne, but that is where his reasonableness ends, for the objective itself is unimportant to him. Shakespeare demonstrates, through his treatment of tyranny, a clear awareness of the delusions of power, that there is no inherent satisfaction in satisfying the desire for more, since there is no end in view. The end is endless.

We have seen that Richard is more interested in proving himself capable of becoming king than in performing the role of a ruler, but more than that he is unable to see that he was striving for something that he never really wanted. He only thought that he wanted to be king. It is conceivable that his wish to be king is simply a projection of his youthful wish for his father, the Duke of York, to become king. In the third part of Henry VI, the young Richard tries to convince his father to seize the crown, saying: “And, father, do but think how sweet it is to wear a crown,” and only after his father’s death does he say that he would make his heaven to dream upon the crown (3 Henry VI I.ii.28–29; III.iii.168). There can be little doubt that Richard thinks he wants the crown, but he can have been projecting what was originally a wish for his father without giving little more than a thought to what is actually involved in performing the functions of kingship. He has no interest in that kind of thing, but he never abandons his youthful addiction to the crown. Shakespeare seems merely to attempt to show that Richard seeks to be king, but in the course of the play it becomes quite clear that Richard does not really know what he wants. He does not know his own mind.

It must above all be emphasized that, from Shakespeare’s point of view, the soul of the tyrant, given its highest expression in this play, represents the darker side of human nature, exhibiting qualities residing in the human character itself. It is even conceivable that the gulf which separates Richard Plantagenet from the rest of the world is not as great as might be imagined at first appearance. Shakespeare’s absorption in the character of Richard which emerges from the soliloquies he has written for him reveals a remarkable sensitivity to that possibility. Richard represents a disposition by no means uncommon if we are to take seriously Socrates’ remark that “surely some terrible, savage and lawless form of desires is in every man, even in some of us who seem to be ever so measured” (Plato, Republic, 572b). It would seem as though Shake-
speare wanted to show utter depravity as it might be experienced in a human soul, the soul of a tyrant; revealing the inadequacy of the tyrant’s conception of what constitutes human happiness, and all that this implies for the human condition. It would be a real question for Shakespeare whether everyone seeks to have more, to overreach others, as his later contemporary, Thomas Hobbes, was to maintain.
The Problem of Religion in Liberalism

RICHARD SHERLOCK
Utah State University
AND
ROGER BARRUS
Hampden Sydney College

Liberalism, the political theory and practice of equality, liberty, and government by consent of the governed, is far and away the most successful of the political forms of modernity. Its success is the result of its recognition of the limits of the modern project.

Modernity aims at the liberation of man from the bondage of necessity through the rational conquest and control of nature. This involves the conquest and control of human nature. The reformation of politics and government is, then, a crucial element in the modern project. What distinguishes liberalism from the political alternatives available in modernity—for example, Marx’s “scientific socialism”—is its recognition of the inherent limits in the effort to master human nature. At some point the necessary means in the modern project—the mastery of human nature—comes into conflict with the end of the modern project—the liberation of man from the bondage of necessity. Human nature cannot be understood to be infinitely plastic or malleable. This means, however, that nature as a whole cannot be understood as finally and completely under the control of man. The success of the modern project requires that men simultaneously struggle against and bow before nature and natural necessity. They must see themselves as both above and within the natural order of things. Nature must be seen as both higher and lower than man. Liberalism’s relative success derives from its acceptance of the fundamental ambiguity in the relationship between man and nature inherent in the modern project.

This ambiguity is reflected, among many other places, in liberalism’s treatment of religion, in particular in its political system of religious toleration. Religion deals with the ultimate questions of human life, pre-eminently the questions of its beginnings and its ends and purposes. Religion is the means by which, for most men most of the time, these questions are articulated, and are given at least the partial and tentative answers that are indispensably necessary for human existence. Openness to these questions of ultimate meaning is the very essence of man’s humanity, and hence of his freedom as a human being. Religion can be transcended only by obviating the important questions that give it life, either by inducing men to stop thinking about them, or by supplying

© INTERPRETATION, Spring 1993, Vol. 20, No. 3
some final, definitive, and comprehensive answer for them. That is, religion can be transcended by converting man into either a beast or a god. Either way, there is nothing left of humanity, or of human freedom.

This is the irony of the apparently more radical political variants of the modern project with their intransigent atheism. The “freedom” of Marx’s communist man, the omniscient individual who does “one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic,” is a “freedom” that can only exist in absolute indifference to the questions of ultimate purposes. Devoid of moral seriousness, it is indistinguishable from slavery to impulse or passion. Much the same can be said for Nietzsche’s “superman,” who finds his “freedom” in the self-conscious creation of his own values. Genuine freedom presupposes genuine alternatives and is characterized by the moral seriousness that necessarily accompanies the recognition of serious alternatives. Liberalism, which accepts the practical need for religion, does not attempt to transcend or supplant it. This is reflected in liberalism’s system of religious toleration. Religious toleration, taming or civilizing religion without supplanting it, in effect establishes the moral grounds of human freedom.

While religion has an important part to play in liberalism, its place in liberalism is tenuous at best. Modernity, which aims at the conquest and control of nature by man, is in its main thrust antitheological or antireligious. It is not possible for man to make himself master of his world without at the same time displacing its previous ruler. This is the root of the antitheological animus of Machiavelli, who initiated the modern project with his call to mankind to rise up and conquer fortune. Liberalism’s regime of representative government, which was invented by Hobbes, Locke, and others to solve at least certain of the moral and political problems inherent in the modern project, participates in modernity’s fundamental hostility towards religion. It is profoundly secular. Liberalism’s founders understood, however, that religion was an ineradicable part of human nature, rooted in the very realities that, according to them, made necessary the political regime of representative government.

Since religion could not be abolished, it had to be accommodated. It could not be accommodated, however, without being transformed—changed from an expression of divine sovereignty into an instrument of human sovereignty. This is the essential purpose of Hobbes’ and Locke’s now largely forgotten works of biblical exegesis. This is also the purpose behind the liberal philosophers’ recommendations on the legal and political arrangements that should govern religion—Hobbes’ secular absolutism and Locke’s religious toleration. Liberalism’s founders went no further in their thought on religion. Only the later liberal philosopher Tocqueville seems to have recognized that, precisely if religion is not to be abolished in and through the progress of modernity, it must be understood to have a necessary place in the modern project. It has a crucial part
to play in the liberation of man from the bondage of necessity. Religion, which Tocqueville clearly foresaw would flourish under liberalism's legal regime of religious toleration, provides the absolute horizon which gives meaning or substance to man's freedom.

1

Hobbes, liberalism's principal architect, attempts to bring to pass through his new science of politics what Plato’s Socrates in the *Republic* argues is the only possible surcease from the evils of political life, the conjunction of philosophy and political power, or the political rule of right reason. He means to fulfill in real political practice the philosopher's longing for rational self-government, or for what the philosopher would call human freedom. Hobbes' rational political order is, of course, a very different thing from the just regime elaborated by Socrates in the *Republic*. For Hobbes, reason rules indirectly, in the system of representative government, rather than directly, as for Socrates, in the person of the philosopher-king. Hobbes' polity presupposes the existence of modern natural science, foreign to Socrates' regime, which reveals what Hobbes conceives as the hitherto unfathomed problems and undreamed-of possibilities of political life. The most important difference between Hobbes' rational political order and Socrates' best regime, however, is that Hobbes' polity is meant to be actualized. It is not a mere pattern laid up in heaven, to which men may look to found a right order in their souls, as Socrates calls his city, but a real political possibility to be achieved in the here and now.

Plato's Socrates teaches that the coincidence of philosophy and political power is an essentially chance circumstance, something to be hoped or prayed for, rather than directly worked for in political practice. This represents Plato's political realism. Plato's realism contrasts with Hobbes' idealism. Hobbes in his political idealism echoes Machiavelli, who initiates the enterprise of modernity with his call to conquer fortune on behalf of man's rational self-government. Machiavelli teaches that chance, like a woman, can be mastered by the right kind of man. The right kind of man possesses what he calls "virtue," a combination of the knowledge both of how to be good and how not to be good, and the flexibility to use either the one or the other according to the needs of the moment (ch. 15, p. 61). To this kind of virtue, traditional religion, with its absolute injunctions and prohibitions, is an impenetrable obstacle. Machiavelli's project for human freedom requires, in the first place, a liberation from the strictures of traditional religion. This, too, is echoed by Hobbes in the treatment of religion, in particular the religion of the Bible, in his new science of politics.

Machiavelli's critique of traditional religion is summed up in his frequently voiced injunction in *The Prince* to trust only in "one's own arms." Those who
trust in their own arms, like the ancient political founders Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus, succeed in their endeavors, while those who rely on the arms of others, like the wouldbe conqueror and uniter of modern Italy, Cesare Borgia, come to ruin (chs. 6–7, pp. 22–24, 26–32). As indicated by the example of Cesare Borgia, whose successes were based on the power of his father, Pope Alexander VI, and whose ruin resulted from the withdrawal of that power on his father's death, the counsel to rely on one's own arms is much more than a recommendation on military organization. It means to reject consciously all outside help, and that means, on the deepest level, to reject willfully all help from above, to free oneself from all divinely inspired restrictions on the rational pursuit of self-interest by freeing oneself from all false hopes or delusions of divine assistance.

This freedom requires a total break from the traditional religious conception of the relationship between man and God, according to which man is the offspring or creation of a loving God, Who placed him in a world stocked with all that he needs for the fulfillment of his being, and Who actively cares for him in his trials and tribulations. Machiavelli's break with the traditional conception is reflected in his argument that "truly it is a very natural and ordinary thing to desire to acquire, and always, when men do it who can, they will be praised or not blamed" (ch. 3, p. 14). This willful break from tradition leads to a radically nontraditional teaching on morality: one should be stingy rather than liberal, giving only of other people's substance; one should strive to be feared instead of loved, using well the cruelty that is necessary and inevitable in human affairs; one should keep faith only when safe to do so, making sure to maintain a reputation for faithfulness (chs. 16–18, pp. 62–71). These rules of conduct, so profoundly contrary to the standards of traditional religion, are for Machiavelli nothing but the nasty prerequisites for man's autoemancipation from the power of chance, and hence for man's self-government and freedom.

Machiavelli's counsel to rely on one's own arms does not lead him to ignore but rather to reinterpret religion. He transforms it into a political instrument. This is the essence of Machiavelli's treatment of the religion of the Romans in the Discourses. He concludes from his consideration of Numa Pompilius, the founder of the Roman religion, "who feigned that he held converse with a nymph," that "there never was any remarkable lawgiver amongst any people who did not resort to divine authority, as otherwise his laws would not have been accepted by the people for there are many good laws, the importance of which is known to the sagacious lawgiver, but the reasons for which are not sufficiently evident to enable him to persuade others to submit to them." Those rulers who understand "the natural order of things will seek" to uphold the foundations of the religion of their countries, for then it is "easy to keep their people religious, and consequently well conducted and united." The foundations of religions are the miracles, the exhibitions of superhuman power, that they celebrate (I.12, p. 150).
The Problem of Religion in Liberalism · 289

What the political use of religion means in practice is reflected in Machiavelli’s appropriation for his own purposes, in *The Prince*, of the miracles attributed in the Bible to Moses (ch. 26, p. 103). Traditional religion is, according to Machiavelli, an immense obstacle to the achievement of human freedom. As reformed by Machiavelli, however, religion is a useful if not indispensably necessary means to that same end. Either way, it is something very powerful. Machiavelli indicates, by his attempt to transform religion into a political tool, just how potent it is as a force in human affairs. Religion represents the longing for transcendence that, for Machiavelli, culminates in his project for the conquest of chance.

Machiavelli is what might be called a hypothetical atheist. That is, his atheism is at bottom nothing more than a hypothesis of his political project. In reality, Machiavelli is not an atheist at all. He is a rebel, in the name of human freedom, against the rule of God. His rebellion presupposes the existence of God as its necessary object. Machiavelli’s political teaching can be conceived as a kind of fulfillment of the will of God, understood as the Creator of man as a rational, and hence potentially free being. Machiavelli understands, however, that there is a problem with God’s providence. What God evidently wills for man can only be achieved by man rising up against the government of God. There is more to Machiavelli’s appropriation of religion—including his use, or misuse, of the Bible and Roman paganism—than mere political utility. He plays something of the part of Satan in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, whose rebellion against God is a crucial element in God’s providence for man (see John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, part 1). This is the warrant for Machiavelli’s retelling of the story of David and Goliath, in the central chapter of *The Prince*, according to which David fights to “give a good account of himself,” rather than to vindicate the God of Israel, and David, rather than waiting humbly for God to supply him with the arms necessary to kill Goliath, has his own knife to do the job (*Prince*, ch. 13, p. 56; cf. 1 Samuel 17). This is only one example of Machiavelli’s many blasphemies. Machiavelli is unquestionably a blasphemer. It should be borne in mind, however, that the sin of blasphemy presumes knowledge of the true God.

Machiavelli’s hypothetical atheism is related to the hypothetical natural science that is the theoretical foundation for Hobbes’ science of politics. Scientific knowledge, according to Hobbes, is not absolute but conditional: it is “the knowledge of consequences, and dependence of one fact upon another; by which, out of what we can presently do, we know how to do something else when we will” (*Leviathan*, I:5, p. 115). This is essentially Bacon’s conception of science. Baconian science is an instrument of human power. Its subject is “the knowledge of Causes, and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human Empire, to the effecting of all things possible.” It is a means, perhaps the most effectual means, to Machiavelli’s end of the conquest of fortune. Baconian science represents a new path to the understanding of the
world, through the method of controlled experimentation, which attempts to catch nature in the “vexations of art” (The Great Instauration, p. 28). It adopts, as its standard of intelligibility for the natural world, human power or utility. Human beings really understand, in Bacon’s science, only what they make. All of this is analogous to the Machiavellian injunction to trust only in one’s own arms.

The premise of Bacon’s science is the denial of the natural intelligibility of the world to man. The natural world is a chaos rather than a cosmos. It becomes a cosmos only through the imposition of order by the human mind. Trusting one’s own arms, in Bacon’s science, means to reject the world given in natural experience, in which man is a mere part within the whole, a form among many forms, and construct in theory a new order of things, a world of bodies in purposeless motion, over which man can make himself the undisputed master. Thinking of things as just more or less complex organizations of undifferentiated matter brings them within the reach of human power. Homogeneous body, which has no purposes of its own, is manipulable by man, while heterogeneous forms, which have their own purposes or ends, are not. This new, and radically artificial, way of thinking about things also removes the moral restraints, related to the heterogeneity of form, on their manipulation. Underlying Bacon’s natural science there is, then, a kind of willful atheism. Bacon’s natural science, with this willful atheism, is crucial to the true science of politics, according to Hobbes, because it reveals the reality of the human condition, the depths of the human problems and the heights of human aspiration.

The lows and highs of the human condition appear, for Hobbes, when man is viewed in the light of the new natural science, that is, the science of bodies in motion. Hobbes begins his teaching on politics with a scientific analysis, while studiously avoiding the use of the word, of the soul and its powers. Soul, according to Hobbes, is nothing but a manifestation of body, its powers nothing but the effects of the interactions of bodies. The first cause of all thought is sense. Sense, however, results from body and its motions. Sensible qualities, he claims, “are in the object that causeth them, but so many several motions of the matter, by which it presseth our organs diversely,” which means that “Neither in us that are pressed, are they anything else, but diverse motions; (for motion produceth nothing but motion.)” Sense percepts are connected together in what Hobbes calls “trayns of thought.” These may be either directed or undirected; those that are directed are “regulated by some desire, and design” (Leviathan I:3, p. 95).

Hobbes’ grounding of thought in the motions of the senses leads him to subordinate reason, which is only one mode of the ordering of thought, to the desires or passions. “The Thoughts, are to the Desires.” he claims, “as Scouts and spies, to range abroad, and find the way to the things Desired: All Stediness of the minds motion, and all quickness of the same, proceeding from thence” (Leviathan I:8, p. 139). Reason, according to Hobbes, is not an inde-
ependent cause of human action, but only an instrument for the all-powerful, underlying cause of desire (Leviathan I:6, pp. 129–30).

Since there is no “Finis ultimis” or “summum Bonum” for man, there is no natural limit to his desires (Leviathan I:11, p. 160). This means, however, that there is no common good for mankind. This in turn implies that there is no natural basis for human association. By nature, men possess rights that they can assert against one another, but no duties that they must observe towards one another. The natural condition for human beings, who are inherently asocial, and who are moved by desires that are essentially limitless, is a “state of warre,” and indeed of “such a Warre, as is of every man, against every man” (Leviathan, I:13, p. 185). This is the root cause of the problems of anarchy, oppression, and war in political society. The scientific analysis of human nature is the key to the discovery by Hobbes of the “state of nature,” with its chaos, violence, and terror, as the bedrock reality of the human condition.

That same scientific analysis, for Hobbes, brings to light the real possibilities for solving once and for all the problems of the human condition. This follows from what Hobbes’ scientific analysis implies about the malleability of human nature. Because there is no highest good naturally given to man, he can, within limits fixed by the passions, shape and mold himself to his own ends. Cooperating with the passions, human beings can rationally remake themselves, to remedy the defects of their natural condition. This is to be accomplished in and through the restructuring of the political community, what Hobbes calls an imitation of “that rational and most excellent work of Nature, Man” (Leviathan, Introduction, p. 81).

Hobbes’ intention in his political science is to refound society and government by teaching how to cooperate with the passions in the organization of political society. Recognition of the horrors of the natural condition leads Hobbes to the discovery of certain prudential rules of behavior, his “laws of nature,” that guide his rational reconstruction of society and government. There is one and only one purpose for which human beings, who “naturally love Liberty, and dominion over other,” can be understood to consent to submit themselves to the artificial bonds of civil society, and that is “the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from that miserable condition of Warre, which is necessarily consequent . . . to the natural passions of men, when there is not visible Power to keep them in awe” (Leviathan, II:17, p. 223).

For Hobbes, all legitimate government is representative, because it is founded on the consent of the governed, and nonpartisan, because it benefits all its subjects equally by addressing a need that pertains to all of them alike. Nonpartisan government enables men to live in peace by giving them something that they can trust in to protect their lives, liberties, and estates. Hobbes’ government is nonpartisan because it is artificial. An artificial ruler has no selfish interests, nor self-serving opinions, to impose on its subjects. Whatever interests or opinions such a ruler might enforce would be strictly general. It is from
this scientific analysis of human nature that Hobbes learns of both the possibility and the means for creating an artificial man to govern over actual human beings as a method for solving their real world problems.

An important element in Hobbes' scientific refounding of society is the reformation of religion, particularly the religion of the Bible. Religion, Hobbes understands, is not going to disappear with the change of social and political organization. Its roots run much too deep for that. It represents the fear that is, according to Hobbes' analysis, the bedrock reality of the human condition. "This perpetual feare, always accompanying mankind in the ignorance of causes, as it were in the Dark," he argues, "must needs have for object something. And therefore when there is nothing to be seen, there is nothing to accuse, either for their good, or evil fortune, but some Power, or Agent Invisible" (Leviathan, I:12, pp. 170–71). Religion represents, then, the reality that makes not only necessary but also possible Hobbes' refounding. Representative government, for Hobbes, supplies the necessary prerequisites, left unprovided by God, for man's comfortable self-preservation, to which the most powerful passions implanted by God incline him. It is, then, paradoxically both a rebellion against and a fulfillment of the divinely established order. Hence, religion cannot be excluded from Hobbes' commonwealth.

Traditional religion, in particular traditional Christianity, interferes, however, with the rational reconstruction of society. Insisting on the absolute dominion of God, counselling faith in Him rather than trust in the arm of the flesh, threatening everlasting punishment for human assertiveness, it restrains men from assuming the powers of self-government and establishing the political forms of human sovereignty. Christianity must, then, be transformed, purged of its belief in divine sovereignty. This is the deepest purpose behind Hobbes' extensive treatment of religion in his political writings, culminating in his teaching of secular absolutism. Secular absolutism, according to which the sovereign power for the peace of society fixes the doctrines and practices of religion, is necessary for Hobbes because sovereignty cannot be divided, "between the Church and State between Spiritualists and Temporalists; between the Sword of Justice, and the Shield of faith." The more profound problem is that human beings in their fears cannot be divided "between the Christian, and the Man" (Leviathan, III:39, p. 499). That sovereignty must not be divided is a conclusion that Hobbes draws from his consideration of the state of nature as the fundamental reality of human existence. The real meaning of this teaching is that human beings, moved by the dire necessities of the natural condition, are compelled to assume for themselves the right and power to govern in their own affairs. Hobbes' defense of secular absolutism is at bottom a vindication of the sovereignty of man.

Hobbes in his biblical exegesis, for example in Parts III and IV of Leviathan, attempts to transform Christianity from a transcendent faith into a civil theology, cutting out the core of the religion while preserving its rhetorical skin, to give the appearance of divine imprimatur to the authority of the human
s

The Problem of Religion in Liberalism · 293

sovereign. The political problem of traditional Christianity is that, since the preservation of society depends on the dispensation of justice, and “Justice on the power of Life and Death, and other lesser Rewards and Punishments, residing in them that have the Sovereignty of the Commonwealth,” it follows that “it is impossible a Common-wealth should stand, where any other than the Sovereign, hath a power of giving greater rewards than Life; and of inflicting greater punishments, than Death.” “Eternall life,” however, “is a greater reward, than the life present; and Eternall torment a greater punishment than the death of Nature” (Leviathan, III:38, p. 478).

To undermine the sovereignty of the Christian God Hobbes attacks two of the pillars of divine sovereignty: the setting forth of laws (i.e., revelation) and punishing infractions (i.e., damnation or hell). First Hobbes undermines the system of rewards and punishments without which God cannot command obedience. Hobbes criticizes the belief in the afterlife, transforming “heaven” and “hell” into strictly this-worldly concepts, denying eternal punishment in any form. Hell is not only immanentized but also psychologized. It is the punishment of knowing that one has missed a possible reward.

The focus of Hobbes’ critique, however, is on the belief in divine revelation. God cannot rule over men if He cannot make His will known to them. A subject cannot be expected to obey laws that he cannot know. Perhaps the most pernicious of all religious doctrines, for Hobbes, is the teaching “That Faith and Sanctity, are not to be attained by Study and Reason, but by supernatural Inspiration, or Infusion, which granted, I see not why any man should render a reason of his Faith; or why every Christian should not be also a Prophet; or why any man should take the Law of his Country, rather than his own Inspiration, for the rule of action” (Leviathan, II:29, p. 366).

Hobbes attacks all of the means by which revelation is supposedly made available to man: the immediate revelation of the Holy Spirit, the mediate revelation of the scripture, and the exemplary revelation of Jesus. Revelation cannot be known as such because the marks of revelation, miracles, cannot be known from the past and have ceased in the present (Leviathan, III:32, p. 414). Hobbes’ argument leaves the political sovereign as the only real mediator between man and God. Christianity, with its Divine Sovereign revealing His laws to man and punishing those who disobey Him, Hobbes transforms doctrinally into a civil religion in the service of the sovereignty of man. This is Hobbes’ form of Machiavelli’s hypothetical atheism. The secular reformation of Christianity, a Hobbesian manifestation of the Machiavellian counsel to trust in one’s own arms, is in Hobbes’ version of liberalism the ultimate requirement for man’s self-government or freedom.

II

While agreeing with Hobbes that the exigencies of the human condition make it necessary to enlist religion in the effort to free man from the necessities
that bear down upon him, Locke, in his version of liberalism, differs from Hobbes in his understanding of what can be accomplished through the political use of religion. He is much more tempered in his expectations. He looks for much less from religion, even when appropriately reformed. Locke’s relative pessimism on the question of the political use of religion is related to a deeper pessimism, concerning the real possibility of a final political solution to the problem of human existence. Human nature as revealed by Hobbes’ scientific analysis is simply too strong and intransigent to be subjugated once and for all by the tool of human reason. Reason itself is driven by subrational desire.

Locke clearly understands that the state of nature persists, if only as an ever-present possibility, even in civil society. This understanding is reflected in Locke’s argument for the right of revolution, to be exercised by the citizen body when those entrusted with government authority in effect plunge society into the state of nature by abusing their powers, and in the related argument for limited government. Hobbes, who rejects any right of revolution by categorically denying that subjects may judge the actions of their sovereigns, is radically more optimistic than Locke on the decisive question. Optimism about the saving power of science underlies Hobbes’ argument for absolute sovereignty, and with it his argument for secular absolutism. Locke understands, however, that if self-preservation is the end of political society, then absolute subjection to the will of the sovereign is a contradiction in terms, since it reduces the establishment of political society to nothing more than a substitution of the oppression of one with the force of a multitude and the cover of law, for the potential threat from many acting individually and without law (Two Treatises, II:2, pp. 316–17). More clearly than Hobbes, Locke respects human nature as the inviolable ground of the modern project of human self-government and freedom.

The problem with Hobbes’ treatment of religion, from Locke’s point of view, is that he underestimates the strength of religious belief, or rather the strength of the passions that account for belief. This is implicit in Hobbes’ own argument. Religion originates in the fears of man, who “looks too far before him, in the care of future time,” and consequently “hath his heart all the day long, gnawed on by feare of death, poverty, or other calamity; and has no repose, nor pause of his anxiety, but in sleep” (Leviathan, I:12, p. 169). It is a consolation for these horrors, revealing their transcendent purposes, promising supernatural protection from them, and explaining what human beings must do to avail themselves of divine salvation. The starkness of these terrors, inherent in the human condition, accounts for the strength of the religious passions. This is perhaps what Locke has in mind when he argues that “The imagination is always restless and suggests variety of thoughts, and the will, reason being laid aside, is ready for every extravagant project; and in this State, he that goes farthest out of the way, is thought fittest to lead, and is sure of most followers: And when Fashion hath once Established, what Folly or craft began, Custom
makes it Sacred, and 'twill be thought impudence or madness, to contradict or question." At any rate this is the origin of much in the "Governments, Religions, and Manners" of the nations of the earth. These fears are the root of what Locke with heavy irony calls the "burning zeal for God, for the church, and for the salvation of souls."11

Hobbes' secular absolutism, however, presupposes a coolness of the religious sentiments, an enlightened cynicism about religious belief, sufficient to allow for the imposition of religious forms by the sovereign for the sake of this-worldly peace. What he presumes as necessary for the proper organization of civil society he appears to contradict in his scientific analysis of man, which culminates in the theoretical recovery of the horrific state of nature. His defense of secular absolutism is based on an abstraction from the state of nature as a spiritual or psychological phenomenon. Hobbes' secular absolutism in practice is more likely to excite than allay conflict, by impinging on matters that individuals cannot help but hold to be of the highest importance. It is, then, in practice rather a threat to than a support for man's self-government.

Recognition of the immutability of the state of nature as the essential reality of the human condition leads Locke in his thought on religion from secular absolutism, to which he adheres in his earliest writings on the subject, to religious toleration.12 In the Letter Concerning Toleration Locke argues for his new approach to the problem of religion on both political and religious grounds. The political argument is a straightforward application of the scientific political theory of the Second Treatise. Since the ends of political society are limited to the "civil interests" of "life, liberty, health, and indolency of body" and the "possession of outward things," it has nothing to do with the saving of men's souls. The "civil magistrate" is to concern himself only with securing to his subjects the enjoyment of the goods of this world, "by the impartial execution of equal laws" (Letter, p. 17). Salvation is entirely the business of the church, "a voluntary society of men, joining themselves together of their own accord to the public worshiping of God in such manner as they judge acceptable to Him, and effectual to the salvation of their souls" (Letter, p. 20). The church has nothing to do with "the possession of civil and worldly goods" (Letter, p. 23). Church and state occupy entirely distinct spheres. Mutual toleration is, then, the only sensible policy.

The separation between church and state, however, turns out in the end to be not quite so clear and clean as Locke at first paints it. Actions prohibited by law because they are injurious to the legitimate interests of society are not made legal by incorporation in the worship of some religion. Even of opinions, only those that are entirely speculative must be tolerated without exception. Religious opinions that have practical implications, by touching on "the will and manners" of society, are subject to regulation. Locke allows for the outright suppression of some religious beliefs: those that are contrary "to those moral rules which are necessary to the preservation of civil society"; those by which
some "men arrogate to themselves and to their own sect some peculiar prerogative"; and those by which citizens "ipso facto deliver themselves up to the protection and service of another prince." He also countenances the suppression of atheism (Letter, pp. 45, 50–52). Locke's retractions from the hard-and-fast separation of church and state point to the underlying secular purpose of the system of religious toleration.

Apropos the social and political situation in which he finds himself, Locke addresses his religious argument for toleration to Christian believers. The religious argument is essentially rhetorical. It is necessary to make such a rhetorical argument because, from the point of view of Christian belief, the political argument, based on the scientific analysis of the human condition, simply begs the crucial question pertaining to the ends and proper organization of civil society, i.e., the question of the truthfulness of the Christian revelation. The political argument is valid only if government is limited to the purposes of Locke's "civil interests." The limitation of government to the security of life, liberty, and property presupposes the doctrine of the state of nature and what it teaches about the ends of human existence.

The Christian revelation, however, opens for the believer the vision of man's transcendent purposes. This can be understood to imply a rather more expansive role for government than is admitted by Locke, perhaps including the care of men's souls. Locke avoids the decisive question and instead seeks to prove that the Christian revelation prohibits enforcement by state power of religious beliefs and practices. He argues that "the Gospel frequently declares that the true disciples of Christ must suffer persecution; but that the church of Christ should persecute others, and force others by fire and sword to embrace her faith and doctrine, I could never yet find in any of the books of the New Testament" (Letter, p. 22). Examples from the Old Testament he dismisses as irrelevant to those who are under the new law of Christianity. For his own part, Locke esteems "toleration to be the chief characteristic mark of the true church" (Letter, p. 13). This is the premise of his reading of the Christian gospel. He can present his own version of Christianity, according to which the chief obligation of anyone who "pretends to be a successor of the apostles" is to teach "the duties of peace and goodwill toward all men," because on the deepest level all religious belief is radically subjective (Letter, p. 28). Religions exist only as opinions of their believers. In the unpublished "Fourth Letter on Toleration" Locke clearly distinguishes between knowledge and opinion, and unambiguously assigns religion to the sphere of opinion.13

Locke does not restrict his effort at the reconstruction of Christian theism, reconciling it to what his political science teaches about the beginnings and the ends of human life, to the Letter Concerning Toleration. The general purpose behind all of his explicitly religious writings is to fit Christianity within the politically legitimate sphere of religion. Locke narrows the essentials of Christian belief from the strenuous creeds of Catholic and Protestant orthodoxy to
the one necessary and sufficient article of faith, that "Jesus is the Messiah." He arrives at this "low church" version of Christianity by denying the significance for Christian theology of any portion of the Bible except the words of the Savior. The Old Testament is superseded by the revelation of God in Christ, and the epistolary writings of the New Testament, since they are addressed to individuals who are already Christians, are inadvertently silent about the beliefs necessary for being a Christian in the first place (Reasonableness, pp. 186–91).

Furthermore, according to Locke, Jesus' office as the Messiah is that of moral teacher. The word "Messiah" means "ruler" or "king." If Jesus is a ruler, then his teachings are laws. His kingdom is not of this world, however, and so his laws are but rules of right conduct or behavior, backed up only by the force of moral suasion. Christians are individuals who accept the simple moral homilies of Jesus, for example the Golden Rule. This is the meaning that Locke extracts from Jesus' call to "repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand" (Reasonableness, pp. 124–36). Christianity for Locke is a purely moralistic religion, a collection of simple homilies fit even for the common lot of mankind, represented by the illiterate and credulous men chosen by Jesus as his apostles. Locke very carefully avoids the argument that divine revelation is necessary for the elaboration of the true morality. He does admit that the assertion of revelation is necessary in order to teach the true morality to the "vulgar and mass of mankind" (Reasonableness, pp. 101ff., 170–75ff.).

The theoretical justification for Locke's political interpretation of revelation is his critique of its epistemological claims in the Essay Concerning Human Understanding. He argues that there is really only one proof of the truthfulness of revelation, and that is the performance of miracles by those who claim revelatory authority for their words. This alleged proof of revelation, however, is self-canceling. There have been many founders of religions, claiming the authority of revelation for their divergent teachings, who have substantiated their claims with miracles. More important is the problem that miracles cannot really be known as such without a complete understanding of the powers of nature. The proof of revelation requires plenary knowledge of the whole of which man is a part. The possession of such knowledge, however, would make revelation supererogatory.15

Locke in his treatment of religion seeks not so much a way to use religion as a way to tame or domesticate it. Religion is too much a part of human nature for it to be simply appropriated by man as a tool for his use. Taming religion is the underlying purpose of Locke's system of religious toleration. Religious toleration civilizes the religious passions by dignifying them as an essential element in the proper ordering of society. It legitimizes them politically, giving them something of a place, admittedly a limited and carefully defined one, in political society. More importantly, it gives them a significant part to play in the functioning of society. The system of religious toleration turns the religious passions to the useful purpose of limiting government to its appropriate sphere,
at least in matters pertaining to religion. Locke's arguments against the intrusion of government into religious affairs have the effect of arming the religious passions for this very important purpose. Locke excites the religious passions while redirecting them, away from the "burning zeal" for other men's souls, to the defense of limited government.

At the same time, religious toleration domesticates the religious passions by turning them against themselves. Locke's arguments concerning the absolute disjunction between religion and politics are intended to enlist the religious passions in the resistance to the intrusion of the church in secular affairs. The mingling of church and state, "which are in their original, end, business, and in everything perfectly distinct and infinitely different from each other," is an offense not only against political order but also against religious faith, amounting to the jumbling of "heaven and earth" (Letter, p. 27). The system of religious toleration transforms, however indirectly and gently, religion as the "burning zeal" for other men's souls into the "war" of every man "upon his own lusts and vices" (Letter, p. 13). The internal transformation of religion will inevitably influence the political behavior of believers. Instead of demanding political power for themselves, they will be on the lookout to resist demands for political power by others. Churches will police each other to insure that none becomes too influential in the affairs of state. "All the several separate congregations," Locke argues, "like so many guardians of the public peace, will watch one another, that nothing may be innovated or changed in the form of the government, because they can hope for nothing better than what they already enjoy—that is, an equal condition with their fellow subjects under a just and moderate government" (Letter, p. 55).

Locke's treatment of religion points to what is new and different in his version of liberalism. Locke recognizes much more distinctly than Hobbes that, precisely if liberalism's scientific analysis of human nature is valid, then human freedom and self-government are ultimately to be attained only in and through the rational balancing of the primordial forces at work in man, rather than in reason's absolute balancing over those forces.

III

What has been usefully termed the second phase of modernity, i.e., the generative phase of classical liberal theory, culminated in the overt and covert hostility to religion that is evident in Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke and a host of others. Such a strident conclusion with respect to an abiding human commitment, however, was not the sort of advice that prudent statesmen could follow. Those with actual responsibilities of governance could recognize immediately that hostility to what the common man holds sacred was not a way of winning or holding his allegiance. More pointedly, thoughtful liberals knew very well
the enduring human realities to which religious belief speaks as well as the patent deficiencies of militant atheism as an answer to such questions.17

These lessons were not lost on the American founding generation. The American founding was an activity of both the theory and practice of liberalism. In a sense it was a practical activity of the highest sort, which is to say a practice governed by a theory about the highest of human things. In its decisive respects the American founding was a fully modern event, governed by the essential themes of modernity. But this fully modern character also reflected the tension concerning religion that is coeval with modernity itself.18

As architects of a democratic regime founded on a primeval quest for liberty that even they saw as divinely grounded ("to which the laws of nature and nature’s god entitle them"), the American founders knew that a regime dedicated to liberty must find a space for the very transcendence of nature that liberty requires and religion articulates.

The tension between the necessity of accommodation and the danger of religious passion which is endemic in liberalism underlies the deep ambiguity regarding religion in the American founding. Though in practice none of the founders wished to establish a specific church in America, they were profoundly uncertain about the ends of toleration and disestablishment and were, therefore, silent about most of the practical questions that have so bedeviled later generations of Americans. As a practical matter they were obviously prepared to tolerate the manifold array of relationships between church and state and among the various churches that were present in the states in the founding era. In theory, however, the founders were open to a number of widely differing solutions to the seemingly intractable tension between religious commitment and political liberty.

With the possible exception of Madison, the founders agreed in varying ways that some variant of religion was, in practice, an important instrument for supporting both public morality and private virtue. This was an enlightenment commonplace, largely under the influence of Locke.19 It received its most eloquent expression in the founding period in Washington’s "Farewell Address," but it was such a commonly accepted belief that its most pertinent practical expression, the Northwest Ordinance, was passed twice: once under the Confederation and again by the first Congress.20

Moreover even those like Madison, whose first concern was religious toleration, understood the need to accommodate the religious sentiments of the citizenry. A careful reading of Madison’s most important contribution, the "Memorial and Remonstrance," shows that it was closely written to appeal to independent, i.e., nonanglican, religious adherents. The argument advanced therein seeks to demonstrate how religious neutrality on the part of the state can benefit religion itself. In this respect the conclusion is surely Lockean (i.e., nearly absolute toleration), but the argument plainly goes beyond Locke in its assertion that religion itself will flourish best in a regime of toleration.21
Madison's Memorial sits astride the tensions over religion in the founding in a manner that belies its overt indebtedness to Locke. The claim that disestablishment will redound to the benefit of religion suggests at least a friendliness to religion that is not found in this manner in Locke's defense of toleration. While Madison's primary interest in toleration is evident in his theory as well as his practice, his concern for the nefarious effects of sectarian religious passion did not transform itself into hostility to religion as such.

Madison's Memorial reflects the complex themes of the founding with regard to religion. One of the most fashionable of these themes is the concern for religious zealotry and the concomitant need to tame divisive religious passions. This theme received its most penetrating expression in the thought of Jefferson, who among the founders most deeply reflected the Lockean teaching on the matter of religion.

Practically speaking, Jefferson regarded religious toleration as an essential element of liberty and his actions to secure it as one of his greatest achievements. This toleration was not, however, universal. Religions that were intolerant could be suppressed, since they refused to play by the rules of toleration themselves. Moreover, Jefferson admitted that some religious opinions might be iminical to public peace and that open expression of such opinions might be forbidden. Significantly, the one opinion that he expressly notes in this regard is the claim that "a foreign prince has power in this commonwealth." Though superficially directed at Catholic allegiance to the pope, the principle itself constitutes a far more ominous assault on the central Christian claim of allegiance to a Divine prince ("Notes on Religion").

In this regard the supposedly overt neutrality of the state in religious matters transforms itself into hostility to the essential religious belief of many of its citizens. Jefferson, however, was not hostile to some forms of religion, broadly conceived, only to religious belief that could not be squared with his conception of liberalism. Properly trimmed of its explicit adherence to foreign powers, religion can be a powerful source of support for public morality. Like his patron Locke, Jefferson never claimed that there was a necessary connection between religion and morality. He was, however, convinced that, in practice, such a connection was extremely useful.

The culmination of Jefferson's attempt to resolve the tension between the utility of religion itself and the dangerous character of many of its traditional expressions may be seen in his own liberal unitarianism, a religion that Jefferson confidently hoped would soon dominate America. This religious teaching may be seen eloquently in his attempt to distill the fundamental core of Jesus' message from the pages of the New Testament, a distillation made necessary because of the manner in which Christianity had been corrupted by the priests and doctors of the Church. The result is the Jesus of Locke: a moral teacher, nothing more. This was the sort of religion that Jefferson thought would be helpful to the success of popular government. Properly covered over with pious
homage to the greatness of Jesus, it might succeed in focusing the attention of men on those moral convictions on which they might all agree and away from divisive claims of an absolute path to salvation.  

Jefferson’s taming of religion nonetheless points to an enduring reality in the same way that Machiavelli’s militant functionalism does. If religion were as essentially dangerous as some of Jefferson’s most impolitic rhetoric suggests, it would be absurd for a prudent statesman to employ it for the noble ends to which Jefferson ultimately sought to put it, i.e., as the foundation of virtuous behavior. In short, his own practice with respect to religion belies the one-sided concern for the effects of religious faction with which he is usually saddled.

Even more so does the practice of the founding generation belie attempts to saddle it with Jefferson’s thought and practice with respect to religion, either in part or in whole. From Jefferson’s invocation of the God of creation in the Declaration, to Washington’s Farewell Address, to the piety of Hamilton and Adams, the founders employed religious rhetoric, invoked religious piety, and manifested a properly religious sentiment with respect to Divine Providence that is quite overwhelming to those whose understanding of the founders on this matter has largely been limited to one phrase from Jefferson. The founders were, for the most part, not particularly orthodox in their theological opinions. But they would never have confused heterodoxy with impiety.

The founders also may have thought more of “nature’s God” than of the special revelation entrusted to one ancient people in Palestine. But this very rhetoric suggests an attentiveness to religious conviction and an acknowledgement of the ends of which it speaks. Furthermore, in some respects nature’s God was a more expansive and demanding Lord than that of biblical theism. His commands were visible to man as such. Being thus visible, he could require universal obedience thereto. The God of nature may have been a theism more attractive to the egalitarian spirit of democratic ages, but it was not thereby atheism of any sort.

Having embarked on a momentous and, in decisive respects, new undertaking, the founders were evidently unsure of the exact character of the practices that would result. This uncertainty is seen plainly in the founding debates over the one wholly new feature of the American religious settlement: the disestablishment of religion. Its critics viewed it as a covert means of supporting irreligion, while its supporters thought it a means to free religion from politics that religion itself might flourish. For Americans of the founding generation this uncertainty about practical matters was not synonymous with uncertainty about or revulsion towards religion itself. That the polity was to be unchurched did not mean that the regime was to be irreligious. Even the manner in which religion was universally presumed to be a support for virtue implies an acknowledgement that the ends of the human soul can be most properly nurtured by religious conviction.

The complex character of the founders’ attitudes toward religion is reflected
in the thought and practice of later generations of Americans. The founders understood well that religion was a powerful force in human community: in modern parlance it had a social "function." The nature of this function and its relation to the ends of politics were, however, deeply uncertain. This uncertainty was transferred to later generations of Americans who have themselves been deeply divided over the place of religion in the public life of America.\textsuperscript{29}

One who understood this uncertainty with the most penetrating insight was the greatest student of the actual practice of democratic regimes, Tocqueville. He understood the obvious fact that religion has a "function" in political regimes. But this observation is so general that it says nothing of any importance. Significance begins to emerge when the query is rephrased. Granted that religion has function, what is it? Put differently, functions do not just appear, they appear as pointing toward some end for which religion is said to be "functionally" necessary or at least extremely useful.\textsuperscript{30}

At this point the difference between Tocqueville and the traditions of Hobbesian and Lockean thought could not be more fundamental. On virtually every point, insofar as religion is concerned, he is a much more subtle and sympathetic analyst than any of the "first founders" of liberalism. Insofar as the origin and end or purpose of religion are concerned, Tocqueville's disagreements with Hobbes are fundamental. Hobbes, for example, located the universal phenomenon of religion in one of the basest of human passions: fear of the unknown. From thence he concluded that, though religion itself could not be suppressed (this fear itself cannot be overcome and in one form leads directly to the Hobbesian state), its denominational manifestations could be refounded as a political artifact. Religion, in other words, could be understood completely in terms of its political function (\textit{Leviathan}, I:9).

For Tocqueville the problem of religion emerges in exactly the opposite manner. Religion is natural to man not because his lowest passions demand to be numbed or quelled. Rather religion is natural because man's highest aspirations seek fulfillment and grounding in the transcendent. Tocqueville never disparages a belief in the human soul and its relation to God, nor did he consider such beliefs of merely political utility. These beliefs spring from a universal human source, the striving for perfection that is the often silent wellspring of human activity itself: "Nothing can prevent such ideas from being the spring from which all else originates."\textsuperscript{31}

Thus, the core of religion, God and His relation to the human soul, is natural to man precisely because of our striving for virtue and our desire to grasp the ultimate foundations of human existence and human destiny. Religion gives voice and substance, often in mythic ways, to that which is highest in human nature, that which positively distinguishes human beings from the material and sensual world of animate and inanimate objects which they inhabit.

As such, the problem of religion for liberalism is in crucial ways precisely the opposite of that found in Hobbes. Since religion articulates the highest of
human aspirations, the problem is not, as in Hobbes, finding relief from fear in human society. Rather it is how to create a space for the noble in a regime that is admittedly dedicated to giving the widest possible freedom for the base desires of material acquisition and progress. How can the high be contained in a regime of the low? Democratic equality seems to breed contempt for the very distinction between the noble and the base, and the reliance on public opinion and observation which dominates the thought of the common man seems to render the truths of religion deeply troubling in democratic regimes in any sense other than the purely functional.

The key at this point is to recognize that Tocqueville refuses to make the sharp and entirely modern distinction between a purely functional understanding of religion and a view of it as pointing to fundamental truth about man’s transcendent destiny, a distinction that he has been frequently charged with.32 To be brief, he seeks to reformulate liberalism, not religion, because the fundamental religious aspiration is not only useful, but noble on its own terms and rooted so deep in human nature that it cannot be suppressed in a manner consistent with democratic liberalism.

Since human nature ultimately aspires to transcendence, this striving can only be fulfilled in two ways: by religious conviction in a divine end for man or in a commitment to earthly salvation in a political kingdom. Man either has faith in God or in God’s earthly lieutenant or vice-regent. The alternative to widespread religious conviction is not secularism but tyranny. For Tocqueville, democratic secularization, the ideal of enlightenment intellectuals, was a contradiction in terms (Democracy in America, II:1:5, II:2:7).

Tocqueville’s rejection of the Hobbesian and Lockean solution to the problem of religion implies a rejection of their formulations of liberalism itself. The soulless materialism that lies at the core of their thought implies the hostility they display to religious faith and the need to contain and tame religion insofar as politically possible. But if religion speaks to the nobility of man, a nobility without which liberalism cannot be sustained, then liberal regimes themselves must be constituted in such a manner that the legitimate desire for peace between sects and denominations does not transform itself into hostility to religion as such. The great end of democratic statesmanship in this regard will be to preserve the respect for diversity while sustaining the religious sentiment of the people itself.

Tocqueville would have understood perfectly the religious motivation behind and aspirations of Martin Luther King’s public activities, even the deeply religious cadence of his speech. Nor would he have been ashamed or embarrassed by it. What he would have regarded as shameful is the manner in which the religious character of King’s public life and thought embarrasses contemporary Americans to the point that they studiously ignore it. In short, Tocqueville would have understood perfectly the distinction between the promotion of a sectarian creed and friendliness to religion as such, a distinction that was a
commonplace among the American founders but which has been lost two centuries later.

Quite obviously this represents a fundamental reformulation of the task of liberal statesmanship with respect to religion, even from the admittedly less hostile version set forth in Locke. But it is also a refounding of religion itself, or at least religion insofar as it has political aspirations. This is best seen with respect to the policy of toleration. Locke's program of toleration was irreligious to the core and was founded upon a rejection of the essential claims of religion itself. Tocqueville too thought that toleration was required in liberalism for what is essentially the opposite reason. Religion itself flourishes best when it is left free of entangling alliances with the regime. Tocqueville never claims that toleration is demanded because religion, though useful, is a fraud. It is the noble aspirations of religion that require independence to flourish, not in order to be tamed. When religion lies down with the regime, it suffers the same fate as the regime. This was a fate that he saw plainly in the case of his own Catholic communion in postrevolutionary France. In deposing the regime religion itself is deposed.

Tocqueville saw a religious life in America that was at once more vibrant and more varied than anything in his homeland. It was also more concerned with what might be called the core of religion and less concerned with formality and ritual than anything seen elsewhere. This too was attributable to the activist and egalitarian spirit of democratic times that sought answers to the most fundamental of human questions but which was impatient with empty ritual and suspicious of inegalitarian ecclesiastical forms and hierarchies. In democratic regimes religion which taught of a transcendent God and the equal relationship of all human beings before this God would flourish to the good of democratic souls and the benefit of democratic regimes. Religions which failed to speak to the deepest needs of democratic citizens, as both men and citizens, would wither. (Democracy in America, II:1:6, I:2:9).

Tocqueville saw the robust character of American religious life and sought to provide a means for nourishing it in democratic republics. To do so, however, requires reformulating both the nature of liberalism and the case for toleration therein. Liberalism was more than a collection of rational contractors pursuing their own acquisitive desires and finding the liberal regime as the most convenient means of so doing. Properly thought-out free liberal societies could achieve a plentiful measure of human greatness, a nobility born out of individual commitment to the ideals of liberty and dignity inherent in a liberalism that refuses to reduce itself to a vehicle for material acquisition. Such a liberalism will nurture religious conviction precisely because of its ability to tame our basest desires and give substance to the highest of human aspirations. It will recognize at the heart of religion not credulous believers and superstitious rituals but "things of the very highest concernment" about the dignity and destiny of the human soul. That religion can become corrupted is no more than an
eternal observation about all things of which human beings partake, politics as well as religion. At its best, however, religion articulates the very nobility that distinguishes man from his fellow creatures, a difference on which humane political order rests and which liberalism forgets at its peril.

Tocqueville himself was not sanguine concerning the success of such a liberalism. He understood full well the powerful forces of commercial acquisition unleashed by liberalism, especially in large republics such as America. But this only underscores the fragility of such a liberalism as he envisioned. Large republics such as America must inevitably foster the lowest of human ends and the most minimal of communal ties. But only large republics of sufficient wealth and size may be able to defend themselves successfully from despotic enemies both foreign and domestic. Insofar as this is true, liberalism may ultimately be incoherent at its deepest level. It cannot defend itself without an enormity of size. But that very size and wealth diverts its citizens from the very commitments that might make liberalism worth defending.

What Tocqueville saw in America before the Civil War was a democratic republic inevitably rooted in local ties and institutions and suffused with religious, specifically Christian, belief that public institutions did nothing to discourage. He saw full well the forces that gave that republic a tenuous hold on American life, but he also saw the primordial human impulses that made it necessary if liberalism itself was to thrive in ages to come.

NOTES

4. Consider in this regard the manner in which Socrates may be said to rule over the people of Athens in the Apology. This ruling was largely due to a chance union of the philosopher and the opportunities provided by the trial.
Machiavelli's animus toward traditional Christianity is well known. The best sources for understanding the depths of his thought on these topics are: Leo Strauss, Thoughts on Machiavelli (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969), and Harvey Mansfield, Jr., Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders: A Study of the Discourses (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979). The reading offered in J.G.A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975) fails completely to come to grips with the depths of Machiavelli's rejection of the ancients and therefore mistakes the surface of his use of language similar to that found in the ancients with the substance below the surface.
8. Hobbes, Leviathan, I:1, p. 86. One of us has already written at greater length on Hobbes' teaching regarding religion. See Richard Sherlock, "The Theology of Leviathan: Hobbes on Reli-
Locke: Political Philosophy Studies on Religion


15. This critique is in two parts that are almost hidden from each other in Locke's corpus. In the Essay Concerning Human Understanding Locke sets forth an understanding of the supposed relationship between reason and revelation and the tests that must be passed if any assertion of revelation is to be properly accepted as such. Later, in the posthumously published "Discourse on Miracles" it becomes clear that no revelatory assertion can possibly pass the test; in fact the test is designed to be impassable.


17. In this respect we point in the first instance to the dichotomy evident in the thought of Hume. Hume's Dialogue has been seen largely as an attack on prevalent eighteenth-century versions of theism such as "natural religion," and his Natural History of Religion is a trenchant updating of Hobbes' thesis about the origin of religion. But in his most important work concerned with political practice, the mammoth History of England, little of this bitter hostility to religion as such is to be found.


19. This view was extensively represented in eighteenth-century thought, and versions of it can be found in Locke, Kant, and Rousseau. More relevant for the intellectual foundation of the colonists was probably its extensive representation in British, often Scottish, moralists of the Enlightenment. See especially D.D. Raphael, ed., British Moralphists, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975). This argument was also a backbone of antifederalist thought and can be seen in numerous selections in Herbert Storing, ed., The Complete Anti-Federalist, 7 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), especially selections 4.24, 3.6, 4.6, 6.14, 2.8.


22. Madison's language is often vigorous in his concern for the evils that religious strife can bring upon a community, such as his claim that "Torrents of blood have been spilt" in Europe in attempts to enforce religious uniformity. Also see Madison to William Bradford, Jan. 24, 1774, in Meyers, pp. 2–5; Memorial, par. 5.


24. Jefferson to Jared Sparks, Nov. 4, 1820; Jefferson to James Smith, Dec. 8, 1822; Jefferson's own religious views are described extensively in Charles Sanford, The Religious Life of Thomas Jefferson (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1984); also see Jefferson to John Adams, May 5, 1817.

Jefferson Bible (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1964); also Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, Apr. 21, 1803; Jefferson to Edward Dowse, Apr. 19, 1803; Jefferson to George Logan, Nov. 12, 1816; Jefferson to Francis van der Kemp, April 25, 1816; Jefferson to Timothy Pickering, Feb. 27, 1821.

26. We would especially call attention to the evident piety, especially with regard to Divine Providence, that pervades the public rhetoric of Washington. The Farewell Address is not unique in its invocation of religious themes. Washington’s various messages to the colonies during the war are loaded with such references. See also Adams to Jefferson, Dec. 8, 1818, and Apr. 19, 1817, in Lester Cappon, ed., The Adams-Jefferson Letters (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959).


28. The most penetrating analysis of the meaning of establishment at the time of the founding is in Curry; Glenn gives the best analysis of the divided sentiment of the founding regarding the specific purposes of the first-amendment religion clauses.


30. On the problem of religion in Tocqueville one can compare the variously flawed accounts of Doris Goldstein, Trial of Faith: Religion and Politics in Tocqueville’s Thought (New York: Elsevier, 1975) and Marvin Zetterbaum, Tocqueville and the Problem of Democracy (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1967). Zetterbaum’s account attributes to Tocqueville too much of Machiavelli’s political functionalism, while Goldstein fails to penetrate to the deepest tensions in his thought on religion. We are indebted here to serious insights contained in an as yet unpublished paper by Ralph Hancock, “The Uses and Hazards of Christianity in Tocqueville’s Attempt to Save Democratic Souls.”


32. This is the point that Zetterbaum overstates with his focus on Tocqueville’s functional account of the political utility of religion.

33. This irreligious core of the practical effect of toleration is seen most clearly in the Fourth Letter but is implicit in the original Letter itself.


35. On Tocqueville’s reformulation of liberalism in general the superior account is Pierre Manent, Tocqueville et la Nature de la Democraie (Paris: Juilliard, 1982).
Ethnicity and the Problem of Equality

KENNETH C. BLANCHARD, JR.
Northern State University

The study of ethnicity is an appreciation of difference. Discrete populations of human beings are characterized by their own languages and idioms, myths and modes of thought, physiognomies and physiques. We may become attracted to these differences merely because they are novel; if we remain attracted, it is because we have cultivated a new taste. This appreciation of difference appears as a healthy counterpart to a more primitive sort of thinking, according to which ‘stranger’ has the same meaning as ‘enemy,’ and ‘foreign’ is indistinguishable from ‘bad.’ If we can agree that the first mode of thought represents progress beyond the second, then we may well inquire how this progress became possible. I submit that the authentic appreciation of difference depends upon the realization that, however diverse the families of men may be, they are all human and that this is what makes it possible for us to love them. The subjects of ethnicity are more than a random collection of interesting colors, sounds, and flavors: they are the manifold expressions of a power which the Greeks called logos. This power, Aristotle believed, is the definitive human characteristic: it distinguishes us from all other visible creatures. Whatever our origins or appearances, then, we are all ontologically akin.

This paper explores the concept of ontological kinship in the writings of two men who confronted it as a problem, Aristotle and Thomas Jefferson. Both thinkers recognized that profound differences exist between human beings and that these differences can easily become the basis of claims made against one another. Both men were compelled to ask whether or in what degree observable inequalities justify an unequal distribution of goods, honors, and powers. And what common rights, if any, can men claim solely on the basis of a common nature? Aristotle and Jefferson reached surprisingly similar answers to these questions, answers which can be of use to us today, for we are forced to grapple with the same problems. Hostility between populations continues to be generated, not only by the ethnic and racial distinctions themselves, but also by the unequal distribution of power and wealth among these groups. To mention but a single example, Asian Americans tend to score higher on Scholastic Aptitude Tests than white Americans, who score higher than Hispanic and black Americans. These scores reflect in turn greater academic and economic achievement over all.1 What accounts for these disparities? “They are due to discrimination,” we would say, to give what is at any rate the most pious answer. But even if it

© INTERPRETATION, Spring 1993, Vol. 20, No. 3
were possible to explain away the position of Asian Americans at the top, we would still be haunted by the suspicion that these unpleasant data reflect an unequal distribution of intellectual talent. I believe it is a fear of this possibility that underlies much of the hypersensitivity over race and ethnicity in contemporary academic discourse. We have witnessed on many college campuses virtual witch hunts for “racists.” We have witnessed increasing attempts to divide student bodies into discrete and homogeneous groups, and to alter not only admission standards but course content for these various groups. We have witnessed the reintroduction of race and ethnicity as standards of fitness in the academy, such that only black scholars can teach the civil rights movement, or Hispanic scholars the history of Mexican Americans. More than one professor, witnessing these events, has suspected that the underlying motive of their proponents is a real fear that minority students “just can’t cut it” in an open and equal academic environment.\(^2\)

If the source of this hypersensitivity is indeed a fear of inferiority, one might suggest that the most potent remedy is to prove the opposite: to show that intelligence is equitably distributed among all racial and ethnic populations. My first response is that, in the current environment, it is simply impossible to put the question. But there are two additional reasons which make this avenue of address unpromising. First, while it is easy enough to refute any argument in favor of a genetically unequal distribution of intelligence, the converse may be impossible to establish. Etiological questions in social science are notoriously difficult to resolve. Like almost all social and political scientists, I am confident that the disparities in achievement between groups are ephemeral and have nothing to do with natural endowment. But is my feeling of confidence a secure enough foundation for the rights and dignity of so many people? No. In the second place, even if we could demonstrate that natural endowment were entirely unrelated to race and ethnicity, this would not mean that all individuals are equally endowed. Some human beings are taller, stronger, and faster than others. Some individuals are, almost certainly, more intelligent than others. There exists, then, a conceivable population which would be inherently more intelligent than the rest of us. If such a population were somehow to coalesce, would intellectual superiority entitle its members to exploit nonmembers? Would they be entitled to lordship over the persons and properties of those who did not make the cut? If the answer is to be no, then we must discover and elucidate some ground for human rights and dignity more firm than any judgement concerning the diverse talents of men.

Such a basis was discovered by Aristotle and, perhaps independently, by Jefferson. It is the purpose of this essay to isolate the idea of human equality in their writings and, more importantly, to show that this idea has a redemptive power. I hope we all agree that tolerance and mutual respect are civilized qualities. I believe it is clear that our times are, on the whole, more civilized in this respect than ages past. I believe it is also clear that the study of ethnicity is or
at least ought to be a particularly civilized activity. I submit that it was the idea of human equality that made it possible for Aristotle and Jefferson to become more civilized than their own times tended to be. If these suggestions may be credited, then we might benefit from this review. It may well be that the acceptance or rejection of the idea of equality will determine whether ethnic studies in the next century will contribute to progress or to decline.

In Chapter 2 of the first book of the Politics, Aristotle makes two arguments to support his contention that politics is a natural rather than an unnatural activity. First, he argues that political communities develop naturally, and growth toward a predetermined end is the meaning of “nature.” Second, he argues that man is the political animal, that is, that it is the capacity for moral-political activity that distinguishes human beings from all other visible creatures. This assertion may seem odd, given that some animals are gregarious and that some men are drifters. But according to Aristotle, man alone possess the power of logos. Logos is that power which makes possible both reason and speech.

Voice, of course, serves as a sign of the painful and the pleasurable and for this reason it belongs to other animals also; for the nature of these advances only up to the point of sensing the painful and the pleasurable and of communicating these to one another. But speech serves to make known what is beneficial or harmful, and so what is just or unjust; for what is proper to man compared to the other animals is this: he alone has the sense of what is good or evil, just or unjust, and the like, and it is an association of beings with this sense which makes possible a household and a city. (1253a10–15)

Logos is the power to make certain distinctions and to communicate them to others who are equally capable of apprehending them. The most important of these is between what seems good to us (the pleasant) and what really is good for us, and between justice and injustice. Logos is the definitive human characteristic. Just as the powers of sensation and locomotion separate animals from plants, so the power to perceive and communicate moral distinctions separates human beings from all other visible creatures. And it is precisely this activity which is the foundation of the family and the city. Indeed, any creature who is incapable of such association, or from a natural self-sufficiency does not need it, is either subhuman or superhuman: a beast or a god.

Taken at face value, this would seem to mean that all human beings are equal in kind: they not only can but must participate in politics. But for Aristotle this equality presents a problem: political life requires that some rule and others obey; familial life requires the subordination of the wife and children to the father; and last but not least, in his times civilized life itself did not seem possible without slavery. How can these necessarily unequal relationships be reconciled with the natural equality that is spoken of above? The answer with respect to slavery, of course, is that it cannot be reconciled with natural equality. Aristotle defines a slave by nature as “an individual who, being a man, is
by his nature not his own but belongs to another.” That is to say, a slave is like a hammer. A man can survive and be human without a hammer, but a hammer cannot really be what it is—an instrument—unless it is owned and used by a human being. A man who by nature could have no life on his own, who could not exist apart from being owned and operated by another man, would be a human instrument or slave. This difference which justifies the rule of the master over his slave is one of kind rather than one of degree. It would be as absurd to say that the master rules the slave because he is smarter than the slave, as to say that a carpenter is smarter than his hammer, or that a runner is smarter than his legs. Consequently, only “those [men] who differ from others as much as the body does from the soul or brutes do from men (they are so disposed that their best function is the use of their bodies) are by their nature slaves, and it is better for them to be ruled despotically. . .” (1254b16–19). No one would deny our right to exploit something. The abortion rights argument—whether its conclusion is valid or not—begins with the unobjectionable premise that it is just to exploit one’s own body for the sake of one’s self. And even the most extreme animal rights activist would acknowledge the right of animals to exploit plants and of nonhuman predators to exploit their prey. And so, according to Aristotle, it is just for the master to appropriate and exploit any creature whose nature differs from his own in the way described. Such creatures exist to be exploited. But his fundamental political principle, that the human differentia is the power of logos, stands in direct contradiction to the proposition that there are in fact men who differ from others as much as the body does from the soul. It is doubtful whether Aristotle really believed that any human beings were slaves by nature; certainly he suggests no empirical test by which natural slaves could be differentiated from true human beings. And the theoretical standard he does set would be sufficient to condemn all or almost all slavery as it actually existed.

On the other hand, Aristotle insists that the relationship between man and wife is not despotic. It is political. Why? Because it consists of two free human beings whose capacity of soul differs not in kind but only in degree. Both the male and female are able to deliberate, but the male also possesses “authority.” Consequently, their relationship is similar to that of fellow citizens in a free regime, the only difference being that citizens usually rotate in offices—taking turns ruling and being ruled—whereas the superior position of the male in the household is permanent. For a man to regard his wife in the same way as he regards his slaves and domesticated animals is barbaric, for her nature differs from that. Similarly, nature confers authority over children to the father. This is because the deliberative element in the soul is not yet complete in the child. Accordingly, Aristotle says: “The ruler of a household, as a husband and a father, rules both his wife and his children, who are free, but he does this not in the same manner: he rules politically over his wife but royally over his children” (1259a39–b1). The most obvious characteristic of political rule, according to Aristotle, is the tendency of the citizens to take turns in office. Since the
Ethnicity and the Problem of Equality • 313

wife does not take turns ruling over her husband, how can this rule be described as political? It can only be because the wife participates in economics—decision making for the good of the household. If she did not, the deliberative element in her soul would be useless, and Aristotle denies that nature makes anything in vain. Rule over the children, on the other hand, is described as “royal” because children do not participate in that deliberation; instead, their parents deliberate for them, as a king tends the interests of his citizens or as a shepherd looks out for the good of his flock.

There are, then, important differences of degree between the capacities of soul of the different members of the household. But there is no difference of kind, and this has fundamental moral and political consequences when we turn to the question, Who benefits, and in what degree, from household rule? Aristotle defines the teleology, or purpose, of rule over the members of the household in contrast to that of the rule over animals and slaves. In the latter case, the ruler and the ruled possess a fundamentally different status with respect to the purpose of the association.

The rule of the master, although when truly exercised is to the interest of both the slave by nature and the master by nature, is nevertheless primarily to the interest of the master but indirectly to the interest of the slave; for it cannot be preserved when the slave perish.(1278b32–37)

That is, one might argue that cattle benefit from the beef industry: their herds are larger, their lives longer and more comfortable, and their deaths less painful than if they lived apart from man. The same would be even truer of horses. Mutual benefit makes the relationship appear friendly and harmonious rather than violent, and therefore in accord with nature. But the benefits to the subordinate are purely incidental to animal husbandry: a man feeds his cows and horses for his own sake, not theirs. And he feeds his slave for the same reason as we put gas in our cars: because otherwise these devices will do no work. On the other hand, “the rule over a wife and children and the entire household,” says Aristotle, “whether exercised for the sake of those ruled or for the sake of something common to both ruler and the ruled, is essentially for the sake of those ruled . . . but indirectly it might be for the sake of the rulers themselves” (1278b39–1279a2). The father, then, may indeed benefit from the operation of the household, but he earns this benefit only in so far as he is one more member, not by virtue of his superior status as father. Household rule is by nature entirely distinct from the appropriation and exploitation of resources that characterize slavery, animal husbandry, and economics in the purely financial sense. The association of the household exists for the sake of each of its members. The superior intellectual talent of some of those members does not in the least earn them a greater share in its benefits; if anything, it is the weakest members who deserve to benefit the most. As objects of value, then, all the human beings enclosed within the household are created equal.

Aristotle goes to such trouble about the household not only because it is an
important element in the political association, but because the distinction between household rule and despotic rule becomes the standard for one of the most important political judgements of all: Which constitutions are good and just? Which are bad and unjust? The purpose of the political community is understood in the same way as that of the household: it is the good both of the society as a whole and of each human being in it.4

It is evident, then, that the forms of government which aim at the common interest happen to be right with respect to what is just without qualification; but those forms which aim only at the interest of the rulers are all erroneous and deviations from the right forms, for they are despotic, whereas a political community is an association of freemen. (1279a16–21)

Human beings will differ in talent, education, etc., within regimes, and the proportion of talented and educated individuals may differ between regimes. Consequently, we may speak of some institutions—such as a property qualification for office—as just relative to an aristocratic constitution. The appropriation and exploitation of one group of human beings by another is always and everywhere unjust, however. Whether the government is a single man, as in Iraq, or a minority, as in South Africa, or a majority faction, does not affect the judgement. A just regime, on the other hand, is one in which the benefit of the ruling group—whether it is a majority or not—is given no preference at all over that of any human being within the regime. Aristotle would agree with Jefferson that some persons are more fit than others to be a president or a senator. But when it comes to the purpose of the regime, whether we understand this purpose as a distribution of resources or as a protection of unalienable rights, all men are created equal.

Furthermore, Aristotle doubted whether the obvious differences in character and talent that occasionally distinguish one citizen from another could justify the political elevation of one class of citizens over another. The difficulty is that any characteristic which is susceptible to differences in degree, instead of dividing men into upper and lower classes, will rank them on a single linear scale from least to most. This is true regardless of what the standard is.

Those who claim to rule because of wealth or similarly because of birth, are thought not to speak justly at all. For it is clear that again, on the same principle of justice, if one of them is more wealthy than each of the others, he should be the ruler of all the others; and in a similar way, the one who surpasses in noble birth all the other contenders on the basis of freedom should assume the leadership of all the others. The same applies to aristocracy, which is based on virtue: for if, of the ruling body, one of them is more virtuous than each of the other virtuous men, then, on the same principle of justice, he should be the authority. (1283b14–27)

Any argument, then, which could justify the rule of one ethnic group over another—say on the basis of IQ tests or SAT scores—would immediately be-
come a threat to every member of the ruling group but one. An identical argument (so close it may be a transliteration) is found in a fragment of Abraham Lincoln’s.

You say that A. is white, and B. is black. It is color, then; the light, having the right to enslave the darker? Take care. By this rule, you are to be slave to the first man you meet, with a fairer skin than your own.

You do not mean color exactly? You mean the whites are intellectually the superiors of the blacks; and, therefore have the right to enslave them? Take care again. By this rule, you are to be slave to the first man you meet, with an intellect superior to your own.5

Since any argument which would justify the rule of a master class or master race ends up putting everything into the hands of a single master, the only political order which would be just by nature would have to emerge by means of a universal equality of opportunity—universal rotation of offices, selection by lot, or democratic election. In his reflections on these and other devices in the Politics, Aristotle sets in motion the historical development of the idea of constitutionalism.

Almost at the other end of this history are the writings of Thomas Jefferson. I concentrate on Jefferson because he expresses in his own thoughts and sentiments not only everything that is problematic about equality, but also a clear grasp of the solution to the problem. At first sight, his work seems an unpromising place to look for this solution, for as is well known, Jefferson was not only inclined toward the view that Negroes were less intelligent than white Europeans, but also believed that the black race was ugly. The best-known examples of the idea and the sentiment are found in his Notes on the State of Virginia. In Query XIV, Jefferson discusses his proposal for the emancipation of the slaves and their repatriation to Africa. He anticipates a question concerning the second part of that proposal: “It will probably be asked, Why not retain and incorporate the blacks into the state, and thus save the expense of supplying, by importation of white settlers, the vacancies they will leave?” To this he objects:

Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which nature has made; and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race.6

Jefferson describes this objection as “political,” by which he means practical rather than fundamental. It is a fact that whites dislike blacks and a fact that blacks have good reason for disliking whites. There is no doubt a connection, one might even suppose a reciprocal relationship, between these two facts:
whites continue to wrong blacks because they cannot bear to face the truth about what they have done in the past; out of denial, then, come new reasons for the black race to despise the white. So regardless of whether integration is a good or a bad thing, white prejudice and the memory of real injustices by the blacks probably render it impossible. Instead, the two races are likely to be divided, for as long as they exist together, into mutually hostile factions.

However distasteful and out of season these thoughts may be to us, it would be almost two centuries before the balance of evidence would shift against Jefferson. And the existence of black nationalism and separatism in the United States would indicate that the question is still alive. In fact, in making the political objection, Jefferson was passing judgement not on the black or the white races, but on the human race. Had he left it at that, we would say only that, in light of the Civil War and the civil rights movement, our estimation of what is practical has changed. But he did not leave it at that. He added other grounds, “physical and moral,” for his separatism. The physical objection of course concerns color, which Jefferson considered to be the foundation of a difference in the share of beauty between the two races.

Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of colour in the one, preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immoveable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race? Add to these, flowing hair, a more elegant symmetry of form, their own judgment in favour of the whites, declared by their preference of them, as uniformly as is the preference of the Oranootan for the black women over those of his own species. The circumstance of superior beauty, is thought worthy of attention in the propagation of our horses, dogs, and other domestic animals; why not in that of man? (Pp. 264–65)

Jefferson expresses more here than a mere preference for his own kind. He endorses a Heraclitean scale of beauty ranging from the lowliest and ugliest creatures to the white Europeans at the top. The black race occupies an elevated position on this scale to be certain, but one below that of the whites. This sentiment is as repugnant to us as the idea of the biological integration of the races was to Jefferson. And it is clearly a dangerous sentiment: if it turns out that black and white Americans are fated to live in close proximity, the view of the one race that the other is ugly would surely poison their relations. However, it is at root nothing more than an erroneous aesthetic judgement. I call it an error, for I believe it to be an idea with no natural (i.e., self-sustaining) foundation beneath it. Consequently, unless some artificial foundation is supplied, the judgement will not be enduring.

Was there an artificial foundation beneath Jefferson’s aesthetic judgement against the black race? This is to ask, Was Jefferson a racist? It may seem almost impious to ask such a question, given the evidence that I have just produced. Surely no one who made such comments today could escape the
scarlet letter R. But we are social scientists, and our judgements must be more precise than public speech is wont to be. Racism is a form of prejudice: the racist pre-judges, i.e., he makes some judgement in advance of the proper evidence on which this judgement ought to be based. Nor is it any use to show him evidence contrary to his judgement, for he has already made up his mind. Prejudice is one of the most important concepts in social and political science, for prejudices both large and small, benign and malignant, form much of the currency of social intercourse. Indeed, it has been suggested that politics is nothing more than action on the basis of some public prejudice.

According to Plato, prejudice means making up one’s mind, and, in order to avoid an unpleasant truth, forgetting why. And in order to avoid remembering the original reason for the judgement, some alternative must be substituted in its place. I suggest that the original judgement lying beneath white racism is an entirely justified feeling of guilt: we have been guilty of a crime, and unless this guilt be expiated, some terrible punishment must inevitably follow. This truth is very unpleasant. It is scarcely any wonder that some white Americans have been tempted to conceal it beneath the idea that blacks are morally and intellectually inferior and somehow responsible for everything that has happened to them. The Negrophobe has in fact concluded that the black is a threat to him, and if he trades in puerile myths about the black character, this is only to avoid facing the real grounds for that conclusion—his own guilt. But how can we determine whether such a prejudice operates in any particular case? The test is this: the man who is in error will not fear to subject his opinion to criticism; the racist, on the other hand, will go to any lengths to avoid real criticism of his prejudice, for I do not suppose he is willing to risk exposing the unpleasant truth.

We may now see that the question Was Jefferson a racist? is not nearly as simple as it seemed. In the first place, Jefferson was intensely aware of the terrible crime of slavery. This is made abundantly clear from his famous statement on slavery in Query XVIII of the Notes on Virginia.

I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep for ever: that considering numbers, nature and natural means only; a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation, is among possible events: that it may become probable by supernatural interference! The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest. (P. 289)

If, as I have suggested, the root of racial prejudice in the United States is the refusal to accept one’s own guilt, we may conclude that Jefferson’s mind was not fertile soil for racism.

Further evidence may be found when we turn from the physical to the moral grounds which he adduces for separatism. Jefferson clearly did incline toward the view that blacks were less intelligent than whites.
Comparing [the races] by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous. (P. 266)

But an inclination, or to use a less favorable term, a bias, is not the same thing as a prejudice. All of us who have opinions on a subject of which we lack knowledge are guilty of a bias. After much investigation and thought we must confess that we do not know, but are inclined to believe, that the earth is round, that light is a wave, that centrally controlled economies inevitably fail. The difference between a bias and a prejudice is that the person who holds the former is willing to admit that he may be wrong. This is to say he knows that he does not know, but merely opines about a subject. On the other hand, a man who is prejudiced is unlikely to admit any uncertainty, for uncertainty would leave him exposed to the terrible truth.

Jefferson was fully aware that his views on the intelligence of the black race were unsubstantiated opinion. He says in Query XIV that

The opinion, that [Negroes] are inferior in the faculties of reason and imagination, must be hazarded with great diffidence. To justify a general conclusion, requires many observations, even where the subject may be submitted to the Anatomical knife, to Optical glasses, to analysis by fire, or by solvents. How much more then where it is a faculty, not a substance, we are examining; where it eludes the research of the sense; where the conditions of its existence are various and variously combined; where the effects of those which are present or absent bid defiance to calculation; let me add too, as a circumstance of great tenderness, where our conclusion would degrade a whole race of men from the rank in the scale of beings which their Creator may perhaps have given them. (Pp. 269–70)

Two characteristics which distinguish the physical from the moral sciences require caution here: one, that precise data are far more difficult to acquire when dealing with human faculties than with tangible substances. And Jefferson concedes that the black race has not yet been viewed as a subject of natural history. Consequently, a solution to the empirical problem of the distribution of talents is unavailable to him. Secondly, more is often at stake in the moral than in the natural sciences. The scientist is much less likely to injure someone when speaking of an arrangement of organs or angles of light than when he compares the faculties of men. An error in this matter may cheat not just a family but a race of human beings out of their birthright. "I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in endowments both of body and of mind" (p. 270).

And indeed, Jefferson is not only aware that his opinion may be erroneous; he professes an earnest desire to see it refuted. "Nobody wishes more than I
do,” he wrote to Benjamin Banneker, a black scholar, “to see such proofs as you exhibit, that nature has given to our black brethren, talents equal to those of the other colours of men, and that the appearance of a want of them is owing merely to the degraded condition of their existence, both in Africa & America” (p. 882). Jefferson understands that, because of slavery, the “opportunities [in Virginia] for the development of their genius were not favorable.” Consequently, he wishes “ardently to see a good system commenced for raising the condition both of their body & mind to what it ought to be,” as fast as conditions may permit.

From our historical vantage point we can correct Jefferson’s pessimism concerning peaceful integration; nor is it any longer possible to doubt that the black race can produce Euclids, let alone students who can understand geometry. All that remains of Jefferson’s separatism is his racial “conservationism,” that is, a desire to leave the ecology of colors unchanged. Whether such a sentiment could exist today without any trace of race hatred, I do not know. But I believe that racial conservationism is unlikely to persist or to have much influence on its own. For our perception of the beauty of anything is rarely detached from our understanding of the nature or inner power of that thing: men are by nature inclined to believe that what is beautiful is also good; what is ugly, bad; and of course, vice versa (Plato, Republic 457b4–5). Our distaste for spiders and cockroaches is directly related to our perception that the one is venomous and the other a spreader of pestilence. These perceptions are of course unreliable: only some spiders are venomous, and the species is on the whole beneficial. Similarly, I suggest that separatism based on aesthetics is unlikely to persist in the absence of the opinion that The Other is bad, that his ugliness affords a view of his inner corruption. And this in turn depends upon the idea that some human beings are good and others bad by nature. Indeed, it may in the long run prove impossible to persist in a belief that a racial appearance is ugly unless one believes that a man may be guilty of something merely because he is black, or for that matter, white.

It is on this point that Jefferson made his greatest contribution toward solving the problem of equality. Indeed, it is this contribution that led us to be interested in him. Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence, and the core of that document—which became the birth certificate of the American nation—is the self-evident truth that “all men are created equal.” What does this phrase mean? From the logic of the Declaration alone we can determine the following: that all men (i.e., human beings, for women are among the governed) have certain essential rights, merely in virtue of being human. This is to say that these fundamental rights do not depend on any quality or power which could distinguish one human being from another, hence equality. The Declaration draws two political principles from the idea of equality: that the purpose of government is to protect these rights, and that no man may exercise the powers of government over another without that other’s consent. Since this is described
as a self-evident truth, we infer that these things follow necessarily from the very idea of humanity. Man is—by definition—the creature whose nature it is to govern himself, both as an individual and as part of a political community. He is capable of recognizing and respecting the rights of others, and consequently of deserving that his own rights be respected. He has a natural right to consent to government, which is to say that he may enter into a community whose essential purpose it is to see that men get what they deserve. If he respects the rights of others, then he deserves the full protection of that community; if he violates the rights of others, then he deserves punishment. This power of self-government is human nature, it is the inner power concealed behind the multiplicity of human faces. It is then a fundamental error to believe that any racial or ethnic physiognomy can betray guilt or innocence; rather, the human physiognomy is the natural indication of responsibility and hence of dignity and worth. And if every human face indicates only one kind of being, can any of us continue long to believe that a racial type is ugly?

There are two obvious objections to reading the Declaration in this way. The first was made by Stephen Douglas in his famous debates with Abraham Lincoln, and is frequently repeated today both by critics of the American founding and by southern conservatives like M.E. Bradford. Since the Declaration was ratified largely by slaveholders on behalf of slave states, the argument goes, the word “men” in “all men are created equal” could not have referred to the slaves. Instead it meant “Englishmen,” i.e., “men who look like us.” This argument is disposed of easily enough; at least as far as Jefferson is concerned, by glancing at his original draft of the Declaration. In a passage later edited out, Jefferson explicitly refers to slavery as a part of a “cruel war against human nature,” and condemns a market where “MEN should be bought and sold.” This much is perfectly consistent with Jefferson’s treatment of slavery elsewhere, and with his lifelong advocacy of emancipation. His writings and letters simply leave no doubt that he considered negro slavery to be a violation of the principles of the Declaration, and hence of natural right. And even without Jefferson’s antislavery passage, the logic of the Declaration is strictly inconsistent with any justification of human slavery. To read the word “men” as “Englishmen” would reduce the document from a justification of independence to an entirely arbitrary statement of preference for independence. This would defeat its explicit purpose, described in its first sentence: to explain ourselves “out of a decent respect for the opinions of mankind.” Of course, it is certain that many of the signatories did not fully implement its logic either in thought or in deed, but it is in the nature of evidence, argument, and especially law, that what we say often means more than we would like it to mean.

The more decisive objection to this reading is that it is inconsistent with Jefferson’s opinion of black intellectual talent. After all, the justification for slavery had always rested on the idea that the slave belongs to that immense set of creatures who are intellectually inferior to the white master. Stephen Doug-
las—whose “pro-choice” attitude toward slavery rested on an implicit justification of slavery—expressed the Negro’s status in this way: in a fight between a white man and a Negro, I must side with the white man; in a fight between a Negro and an alligator, I must side with the Negro. This elegant analogy combines a small measure of liberality toward the slave (he is, at least, superior in status to a dangerous reptile) with the implicit argument that anything which a Negro may with justice do to an alligator, a white man may with justice do to a Negro. The question which becomes decisive here—if indeed men may indeed be divided into classes according to intellectual talent—is whether such a classification commits Jefferson, or ourselves, to Judge Douglas’s arrangement of justice.

Jefferson demonstrates that it does not. In the first place, he draws a distinction between intellectual and moral talent. He says in Query XIV that

Whether further observation will or will not verify the conjecture, that nature has been less bountiful to them in the endowments of the head, I believe that in those of the heart she will be found to have done them justice. That disposition to theft with which they have been branded, must be ascribed to their situation, and not to any depravity of the moral sense. (Pp. 268–69)

Jefferson is not arguing here that blacks are good-natured but childish. Rather he is arguing that, even if their race is less likely than that of the whites to produce such geniuses as Epictetus, Terence, and Phaedrus, it is equally capable of producing fully functional human beings. Whereas the ability to understand or derive advanced geometrical theorems may indeed distinguish one human being from another, the moral sense, the ability to understand and derive conclusions about justice, distinguishes human beings from all other visible beings. Jefferson reads their so-called disposition to theft precisely as a sign of this moral sense. For

The man, in whose favour no laws of property exist, probably feels himself less bound to respect those made in favour of others. When arguing for ourselves, we lay it down as a fundamental, that laws, to be just, must give a reciprocation of right: that without this they are mere arbitrary rules of conduct, founded in force, and not in conscience. And it is a problem which I give to the master to solve, . whether the slave may not as justifiably take a little from one, who has taken all from him, as he may slay one who would slay him? (P. 269)

Since the master and the slave are equal in their possession of the moral sense, relations of justice between them ought to involve a reciprocation of right. Slavery is a fundamental violation of this reciprocation, based as it is on the simple principle: “You work. I’ll eat.” It is to the slave’s credit if he should refuse to accept the master’s terms. And there is no reason to suppose that a morally responsible creature, exploited by his equal, as the slave has been,
should forever limit his response to petty theft. Jefferson was a careful reader of Locke's Second Treatise, and Locke makes it clear that deadly force is justified against anyone who would try to get me into his power, for "I have no reason to suppose, that he, who would take away my Liberty, would not when he had me in his Power, take away every thing else" (III.18.6–8). By enslaving a creature who is his moral equal, the former has given to the latter not merely just reason to steal but just reason to slit his throat in the night upon the earliest opportunity. Jefferson's recognition of this truth led to his insistence upon gradual emancipation and accounts for his suspicion that peaceful integration of the races was politically impossible. But he did not suppress the truth, as his fellow Virginians did, and so he stands, I would argue, outside the evolution of race hatred in the southern United States.

From these considerations, Jefferson could draw two inferences. First, that the black race was as capable of moral excellence as the white race. "We find among them numerous instances of the most rigid integrity, and as many as among their better instructed masters, of benevolence, gratitude, and unshaken fidelity" (Query XIV, p. 269). Second, and more importantly, that the question concerning their measure of intellectual talent is quite irrelevant to the basic questions of justice. In a letter to Henri Gregoire, Jefferson repeats his sincere wish to see "a complete refutation of the doubts I myself entertained and expressed on the grade of understanding allotted them by nature, and to find that in this respect they are on a par with ourselves" (p. 1202). And he again acknowledges that these doubts were based on insufficient evidence: "I expressed them therefore with great hesitation." But he goes on: "whatever be their degree of talent it is no measure of their rights. Because Sir Isaac Newton was superior to others in understanding, he was not therefore lord of the person or property of others" (p. 1202, my emphasis). This distinction between talent—intellectual or otherwise—and rights is fundamental not only to the idea of political liberty but to democracy as well. For human beings are manifestly unequal in many respects and in many ways may be ranked as better or worse. But they must be equal in something, else there would be no common name. Said Lincoln, "the negro is not our equal in color—perhaps not in many other respects; still, in the right to put into his mouth the bread that his own hands have earned, he is the equal of every other man, white or black." Human identity is a matter of not of talents but of rights, flowing from our common nature as morally capable beings.

What redeemed Jefferson, and the only thing that will redeem us, is a simple appreciation of what the human being is. There are many obstacles to such an appreciation. We tend to confuse the look of things for what those things really are, we are tempted to judge people by the color of their skin rather than the content of their characters. But there are other obstacles as well. Most of us are strongly inclined to believe that the intellectual endowment of diverse races and ethnic groups is roughly equal. And since racists almost always believe that the
other group is unequally endowed, we allow ourselves to suspect the converse: that anyone who believes in or suspects unequal endowment must be a racist. This is dangerous not only because it prevents us from appreciating men like Jefferson but because it leaves the argument against racism dependent on an empirical question which is not in our power to resolve. Nor would a resolution with regard to race be enough. For it is very unlikely that individual human beings will turn out to be equal in intellectual endowments: we are not all Isaac Newtons, or Thomas Jeffersons, or Martin Luther Kings. But we are human beings, and as such we demand to be treated as responsible creatures, capable of self-government. This is to say that we insist on the right to do precisely as we please with whatever is exclusively our own. We insist on this as individuals—this is what we mean by "liberty," and we insist on it when we join together as communities—this is what we mean by "democracy." And unlike the characteristics mentioned above, the right of self-government is not susceptible to differences in degree: one either has it or not because one either is or is not human.

I am strongly inclined to believe that we will discover, over the course of time, that no differences in the intellectual endowment of various ethnic groups exist, or that if they do exist, they are both marginal and ephemeral in nature. But I insist that this empirical problem does not affect the principal questions of justice which have confronted us in previous centuries and will continue to confront us in the next. Slavery was a monstrous injustice not because Jefferson was wrong about the intellectual endowment of the Negro—which I believe he was—but because it is the very meaning of injustice for any human being to make himself lord of the person and property of another. Segregation had to be abolished not because black children possess as much promise as white children—which I believe they do—but because it is a manifest injustice for any group of citizens, even the majority, to govern in their own interest at the expense of others. The idea of equality, which has been equally accessible to Aristotle, Jefferson, and ourselves, ought to be the point of departure for any social and political science, not merely because it is good, but also because it is true.

NOTES

1. The relative achievements of black and white America are summarized in A Common Destiny: Blacks and American Society, Gerald David Jaynes and Robin M. Williams, eds. (Washington: National Academy Press, 1989). See especially the first chapter, "Summary and Conclusions." This study presents an account of impressive absolute progress on the part of black Americans measured against a persistent disparity between them and their white counterparts.

2. "It's easier for the faculty to level down by arguing that everything in the curriculum is just ideology than it is to pile on the work that's required, because deep in their hearts many of the ideologues don't believe that these minority kids can cut it." Quotation from Fred Siegel, "The Cult of Multiculturalism," The New Republic 204 (Feb 18, 1991):36.
3. Quotations from Aristotle's *Politics* are taken from the excellent translation of Hippocrates G. Apostle and Lloyd P. Gerson (Grinnell, IA: Peripatetic Press, 1986). Slightly more precise, but less accessible to those unfamiliar with Greek, is the translation by Carnes Lord.

4. This is not to deny that the household and the city are very different institutions, according to Aristotle. Indeed, he begins the *Politics* by warning us against those who confound the two. The primary natural purpose of the family is to serve the needs of everyday life. But what is one living for? The family alone cannot provide an adequate answer to this question, but the city can. The end purpose of the city is the good life, the life which justifies itself. In order to achieve this end, the city incorporates the family but is obviously more than the sum of the families.

5. Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings, Roy P. Basler, ed. (New York: World Publishing Company, 1946), p. 278. The same argument also occurs in a fragment where Lincoln cites Henry Clay. Clay argues that the defense of slavery on the grounds of the intellectual inferiority of the Negro "if it proves anything at all, proves too much. It proves that among the white races of the world any one might properly be enslaved by any other which had made greater advances in civilization. And, if this rule applies to nations there is no reason why it should not apply to individuals; and it might easily be proved that the wisest man in the world could rightfully reduce all other men and women to bondage." The Political Thought of Abraham Lincoln, Richard N. Current, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 328. One should note that Clay's argument is supported by the theory and practice of the Third Reich. Both in Mein Kampf and in the Nazi state the elevation of the folk resulted in the elevation of the Führer.


7. "The handsomest ape is ugly compared with humankind; the wisest man appears as an ape when compared with a god—in wisdom, in beauty, and in all other ways" (Heraclitus).

8. The earliest and to my mind most compelling analysis of prejudice can be found in the *Apology* of Socrates. Socrates finds himself accused of conducting certain investigations and of teaching certain sciences, such as physics and rhetoric, when in fact he has no part in these things. How, then, did he come to be accused of practicing them? He explains that his real business—the public business of philosophy—was to interrogate each of the citizens in order to find out whether that citizen is as wise as he claims to be—whether he knows what he claims to know about important things like justice, virtue, and piety. Inevitably it turns out that the citizens know less than they had supposed: by asking them embarrassing and difficult questions, Socrates exposes their ignorance. This is not a pleasant experience. They learn to hate Socrates, and say that he is disgusting and corrupts the young. When someone asks what Socrates does or says that is disgusting and corrupting, "they say the things that are ready at hand against all who philosophize. For I do not suppose they would be willing to speak the truth, that it becomes quite clear that they pretend to know, but know nothing." To put it in more familiar language, Socrates is the victim of a stereotype.

9. "I view their distresses," wrote David Rice in 1792, "I read the anger of Heaven, I believe that if I should not exert myself, when, and as far, as in my power, in order to relieve them, I should be partaker of the guilt." From Charles S. Hyneman and Donald S. Lutz, eds. American Political Writing during the Founding Era (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1983), p. 859.

10. See First Things, by Hadley Arkes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). Professor Arkes argues that the entire logic of politics and morality flows from the fact that human beings are, by nature, morally responsible creatures.

11. Jefferson says at the end of Query VIII that "In the very first session held under the republican government, the assembly passed a law for the perpetual prohibition of the importation of slaves. This will in some measure stop the increase of this great political and moral evil, while the minds of our citizens may be ripening for a complete emancipation of human nature" (p. 214). He continued to hope for such a ripening to the end of his life.

Political Theory publishes articles on political philosophy from a variety of methodological, philosophical and ideological perspectives. It offers essays in historical political thought, modern political theory, normative and analytic philosophy, the history of ideas, as well as critical assessments of current work.

The journal serves as the leading forum for the development and exchange of political ideas. It's broad in scope and international in coverage. Political Theory has no single affiliation or orientation, and it's dedicated to serving the entire political theory community.

Political Theory brings you the latest thought and theory on political philosophy. The editorial board is truly representative and international, and it's dedicated to giving you thought-provoking and informative scholarship in a variety of forms, including:

- Feature Articles
- Critical Responses
- Books in Review
- Review Essays
- Special-Topic Symposia
- Annual Index

Quarterly: February, May, August, November

Subscribe Today!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Year</th>
<th>2 Years</th>
<th>3 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>$46</td>
<td>$92</td>
<td>$138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>$134</td>
<td>$268</td>
<td>$402</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PUBLIUS: THE JOURNAL OF FEDERALISM

Published by the
Center for the Study of Federalism
and University of North Texas

Editors: Daniel J. Elazar and John Kincaid

PUBLIUS is a quarterly journal now in its twenty-second year of publication. It is dedicated to the study of federal principles, institutions, and processes. PUBLIUS publishes articles, research notes, and book reviews on the theoretical and practical dimensions of the American federal system and intergovernmental relations and other federal systems throughout the world.

Forthcoming topical issues will feature articles on counties in the federal system, federal preemption of state and local authority, federalism in Spain and Switzerland, and much more, as well as the PUBLIUS Annual Review of American Federalism edited by Ann O'M. Bowman and Michael A. Pagano.


ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES: Individual $25; Institutional $35. (Add $5.00 for foreign postage.)
Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal

The Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal is published in association with the Department of Philosophy, the New School for Social Research. The Journal is a forum for the communication of ideas concerning continental philosophy and its tradition.

VOL. 16 NO. 1

PIERRE ADLER Prolegomena to Phenomenology: Intuition or Argument?
HERIBERT BOEDER The Privilege of Presence
J.K. MISH'ALANI Being and Infestation
BETTINA BERGO The God of Abraham and the God of the Philosophers: A Reading of Emmanuel Levinas's "Dieu et la Philosophie"
JEAN GRONDIN The Conclusion of the Critique of Pure Reason
VOLKER REINECKE and JONATHAN UHLANER The Problem of Leo Strauss: Religion, Philosophy and Politics
WAYNE WAXMAN Time and Change in Kant and McTaggart
PÉTER VARDY Technology in the Age of Automata
OSKAR BECKER The Theory of Odd and Even in the Ninth Book of Euclid's Elements
LOUK FLEISCHACKER On the Mathematization of Life

BOOK REVIEWS and REVIEW ESSAYS

WAYNE KLEIN Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy
BERNARD FLYNN Texts and Dialogues: Merleau Ponty
EDUARDO MENDIETTA Mead and Merleau-Ponty: Toward a Common Vision
RICK LEE Quodlibetal Questions of William of Ockham
PIERRE ADLER Commentateurs d'Aristote au Moyen-Age Latin. Bibliographie de la littérature secondeire récente. Medieval Latin Aristotle Commentators
DIRK EFFERTZ Kant's Model of the Mind

All communications should be addressed to the Editor, Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal, Department of Philosophy, New School for Social Research, 65 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10003. The Journal is biannual. Domestic rates: Individuals: $12.50/year; Students: $8.00/year; Institutions: $20.00/year.
The Michigan Journal of Political Science

A University of Michigan Student Journal of Political Studies

The Michigan Journal of Political Science is a biannual scholarly publication edited by undergraduates at The University of Michigan. For its presentation of noteworthy papers by outstanding students nationwide, the MJPS is regarded as one of the most respected student journals in the country.

The Grace Award

Each year the editorial staff recognizes the best submission to the journal with the presentation of the Grace Award. This award, established in 1985, honors the late Frank Grace, Professor of Political Science from 1943-83. The recipient of this award receives $500, and is published in the journal. All undergraduate papers submitted are eligible for this competition.

The editors will consider submissions relating to all aspects of Political Science, including but not limited to: political theory and methodology, world and comparative politics, American government, public policy, history, sociology, and economics.

All submitted articles become the property of the Editorial Board and MJPS.
Subscription rates per volume (3 issues): individuals $25
libraries and all other institutions $40
students (four-year limit) $16

Postage outside U.S.: Canada $4.50 extra; elsewhere $5 extra by surface mail (8 weeks or longer) or $11.00 by air.
Payments: in U.S. dollars and payable by a financial institution located within the U.S. or the U.S. Postal Service.

Please print or type

ORDER FORM FOR NEW SUBSCRIBERS
(Not for renewals—current subscribers will be billed)

I wish to subscribe to INTERPRETATION.

☐ bill me name ___________________________________________ ☐ student
☐ payment enclosed address ____________________________________

_________________________________________ ZIP/postcode __________

☐ air mail country (if outside U.S.) ________________________________

GIFT SUBSCRIPTION ORDER FORM

Please enter a subscription to INTERPRETATION for

name ___________________________________________ ☐ student
address __________________________________________

_________________________________________ ZIP/postcode __________

☐ air mail country (if outside U.S.) ________________________________

☐ bill me from: name __________________________________________
☐ payment enclosed address ______________________________________

_________________________________________ ZIP/postcode __________

INTERPRETATION will send an announcement to the recipient and acknowledgment to you

RECOMMENDATION TO YOUR LIBRARY

to: the Librarian, ___________________________________________
I recommend that our library subscribe to INTERPRETATION, A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY [ISSN 0020-9635], at the institutional rate of $40 per year (three issues).

signature ___________________________________________
name ___________________________________________

date __________________ position _______________________

INTERPRETATION, Queens College, Flushing, New York 11367-0904, U.S.A.
Forthcoming

Patrick Coby  Socrates on the Decline and Fall of Regimes
Richard Burrow  *Gulliver's Travels*: The Stunting of a Philosopher

Reviews

Charles E. Butterworth  Husain Haddawy’s New Translation of *The Arabian Nights*
Michael P. Zuckert  *The Unvarnished Doctrine: Locke, Liberalism, and the American Revolution*, by Steven M. Dworetz
Charles T. Rubin  *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, by Arne Naess

Lucia Boyden Prochnow  An Index to *Interpretation*, volumes 11 through 20