

# Interpretation

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## The Problem of Carl Schmitt's Political Theology

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*Note: The following is a response to Jianhong Chen's article "What Is Carl Schmitt's Political Theology?" (Interpretation, Volume 33, Issue 2, Spring 2006).*

In his story "The Lightning-Rod Man," Herman Melville paints an unsettling portrait of a merchant who hustles from house to house during frightening thunderstorms, trying to sell the latest model of copper lightning rods. Driven by fear for physical safety, calculations of scientific probability, and desire for commercial gain, on his sales trips during lightning he avoids crowds of men, tall men and high buildings, and he never rings "a bell of any sort." His behavior and advice give away his identity: the lightning-rod man is a modern-day devil, trying to destroy the orientation of man towards God and to keep him away from community and Church by deceiving him into thinking that science and commerce will protect him from God's omnipotent will. In the story the narrator wins a ferocious victory over the devil and his devilish instrument of power: "I seized it; I snapped it; I dashed it; I trod it; and dragging the dark lightning-king out of my door, flung his elbowed, copper sceptre after him." Not everyone, though, has the narrator's clear sight and courage: "But spite of my treatment, and spite of my dissuasive talk of him to my neighbours, the Lightning-rod man still dwells in the land; still travels in storm-time, and drives a brave trade with the fears of man" (Melville 1998, 75-83).

Carl Schmitt would have understood immediately whom Melville was portraying, even without the reference to church bells. In 1970, a century after Melville, in his last book *Political Theology II*, Schmitt, in an acerbically satirical essay, characterizes the Promethean position as the

position of the enemy: “Eripuit fulmen caelo, nova fulmina mittit / Eripuit caelum deo, nova spatia struit” (Schmitt 1970, 126; see Meier 1998, 5), “He wrested lightning from heaven and sends out new lightning bolts himself / He wrested heaven from God, and builds new spaces himself.” In doing so, Schmitt sides with Cardinal de Polignac, who in his *Anti-Lucretius sive De Deo et Natura* (1747) takes a stand against philosophers from Epicurus to Spinoza. Polignac’s “Eripuit fulmen Iovi” was an attack on the philosophic hubris of Epicurus. By taking up Polignac, Schmitt takes a stand against Turgot, who had used Polignac’s words of disdain as praise for the Promethean Benjamin Franklin: “he wrested lightning from heaven.” But man’s technological effort to make himself the ruler, the “dark king” of the world, driven by his desire for security, is doomed to fail. Science can neither account for nor control the truly sovereign power. It is no match for the almighty, inscrutable God. What his enemies celebrate as human achievement and greatness, Schmitt considers to be “anti-godly self-deification” forgetful of man’s proper place. It is rebellion against the Creator who demands obedience.

An age that denies the truth of revelation is living a fatal lie: “We live in an age of illusion and deception,” a young Carl Schmitt diagnoses in 1916. Our modern-day state of illusion is the result of a historical development brought about by people falling for the life offered by the Lightning-rod man. But whereas Melville’s portrayal of the devil is openly ridiculous, Schmitt conceives of evil as deceptively seductive. The Antichrist “knows how to imitate Christ and makes himself so similar to him that he tricks all out of their souls” (Schmitt 1916, 65 f.; see Meier 1998, 25). He lures people not by appealing only to their need for *physical* security, but—in the words of Paul in his First Letter to the Thessalonians (5,3)—by promising “*peace and security.*” According to Schmitt, one particular historical *decision* in the quest for political peace and physical comfort has provided the Antichrist with a more dangerously fertile ground than he ever had before: “The strongest and most consequential of all spiritual turns in European history I consider the step undertaken by the seventeenth century from traditional Christian theology to the system of a ‘natural’ science. Until this day this has determined the direction that all ensuing development had to take. [...] Therewith the direction to neutralization and minimalization was taken and the law accepted, according to which European humanity has acted and that has shaped its *concept of truth*” (Schmitt 1963, 88 f., my italics).

Many interpreters, though not all, have taken Schmitt’s formulations of “spiritual turns” in the form of “neutralization” and

“minimalization” of the truth as the matter-of-fact observations of a social scientist, a theorist of secularization free of “value judgments.” A recent one is Jianhong Chen in his article “What Is Carl Schmitt’s Political Theology?” It is the goal of this article to demonstrate why the interpretation of Schmitt as a theorist of secularization is wrong. In order to evaluate Schmitt’s political theory correctly, it has to be understood in light of Schmitt’s own “concept of truth,” which is not one based on “scientific” truth.

Beginning with the abandonment of sixteenth-century theology in favor of seventeenth-century metaphysics, followed by the increasing influence of economics and technology, Schmitt views the history of modernity as driven by a continuing quest for a neutral and safe haven on earth *in denial of the necessity to take a side between good and evil*. In this development, theological concepts have become “uninteresting and private,” God himself is neutralized, reduced to a “parasite of ethics” and becomes, “as Hamann has said against Kant, a concept, and ceases to be a being” (Schmitt 1963, 82, 89). But for Schmitt, a “neutral” position, the liberal attitude of a “value-free” science, is impossible. His entire work can be understood as taking sides against all attempts to “neutralize” the truth, to overlook the distinction of good and evil, right and wrong: “It is the opposites of good and evil, God and Devil, between which there exists as a matter of life and death an Either-Or which knows of no synthesis, of no ‘higher third’” (Schmitt 1934, 24).

Schmitt’s “concept of the enemy” flows directly from his concept of truth and is as incompatible with a neutral position: “The enemy is our *own* question as a figure” (Schmitt 1950b, 90; 1991, 217; see Meier 1998, 46, n. 54; my italics)—a question each and everyone is existentially confronted with and from which one cannot hide. Whoever refuses to hear and to answer this question in the right way, whoever hopes to be able to remain neutral, whoever fails to act and fight a figure like the Lightning-rod man, sides with evil. Schmitt knows only derision for the “liberal metaphysics” or the metaphysics of liberalism that believes it to be “possible to answer the question: Christ or Barrabas? with a motion to adjourn or the instituting of an investigative committee” (Schmitt 1934, 34). By contrast to a revelation that results in a *division* of mankind into believers and nonbelievers, friend and enemy, the liberal discourse of an inclusive mankind suggests the illusionary neutral ground of a common humanity: “whoever says mankind intends to deceive” (Schmitt 1933, 37; see Meier 1998, 22 f.). Schmitt’s motto, taking up Luther’s position on the cardinal Christian virtue, is: “humilitas rather than humanitas” (Schmitt 1991, 274; see Meier 1998, 89). Or, as Schmitt puts it

bluntly, quoting Cardinal Newman: “No medium between Catholicity and atheism” (Schmitt 1934, 23).

In 1916 Schmitt condemns the illusion of humanity in strong terms. Man’s usurpation of God’s position in the process of secularization has resulted in a disastrous “confusion” that has mistakenly turned “right” into mere “might,” “faithfulness” into “calculability,” “truth” into scientific “correctness,” “beauty” into “good taste,” and “Christianity” into a “pacifist organization” (see Meier 1998, 3 ff.). More than 50 years later, in his last book *Political Theology II*, Schmitt writes of this “new, purely worldly-human science” as an “autism,” “nothing other than self-empowerment,” “nothing but self-authorization,” “anti-godly self-deification” directed “polemically against a theological transcendence” (see Meier 1998, 5 f.). Though the “spirit of technicity” may be “evil and devilish,” it is no mere mistake people make without knowing better. They *do* know better. The truth has been *revealed* to them and it is a *sin* to refuse to submit oneself to it. Even if many theologians today are less uncompromising in their condemnation of modern life than theologians used to be, orthodox positions have always denied that the individual is in any way free to decide on and pursue his own good and have instead called for unquestioning obedience to revelation—be it Judaism, Christianity or Islam—as the one thing needful. For who can *know* that enlightenment is not in fact the beginning of the slow but efficient work of evil to gradually rob revealed religion of its legitimacy by making faith a private matter, in order to gradually make it disappear entirely? Both Carl Schmitt’s political theology and fundamentalist political theologies today oppose enlightenment and the “neutral” spheres it has carved out where people try to hide from the decision between good and evil on which their life depends. The “central domain of spiritual existence cannot be a neutral domain” (Schmitt 1963, 94).

In the light of Schmitt’s condemnation of the belief in a value-free, neutral position that “avoids the core of the political idea, the morally demanding decision” (Schmitt 1934, 83; see Meier 1998, 1 ff., 12 ff.), it is ironic that Chen’s article attempts once again to establish Schmitt as an amoral, value-free, objective scientist. Although political theology is now widely discussed as never before, Chen fails to mention what the term describes today—a political theory or action that understands itself as based on faith in revelation. It is also strange that Chen refuses to engage the question whether Schmitt, who has written not just one, but two books titled *Political Theology* and speaks of “*my* political theology” in *Political Theology*

*II*, may consider himself to be a political theologian, i.e. a political thinker or theorist who bases his theorizing on his faith in revelation. Since Chen claims that “political theology” in Schmitt has nothing to do with faith-based political action, he does not approach the question of how Schmitt understands himself and his own theorizing, and of how his statements against “anti-godly self-deification” are to be understood. In an attempt to defend a purely academic meaning of the term, Chen’s “surface” study of a few of Schmitt’s translated writings leads him to conclude that Schmitt uses the term as a *sociologist*, free of any moral judgment, to *objectively* describe the historical process of “so-called secularization” (Schmitt 1965, 61). Political theology in Schmitt for Chen “means a structural correspondence between theological and juristic concepts, and a structural transformation of traditional theological concepts into modern political concepts” (Chen, 159). Chen even claims that Schmitt “*defines* political theology as *sociology* of the concept of sovereignty” (167, my italics). The question Chen fails to confront is precisely *who* in Schmitt’s thought is sovereign. On the answer to this question depends how Schmitt judges the possibility of the “transformation” of divine sovereignty into human sovereignty, or the “correspondence” between the divine and the merely human, or whether they are, in Schmitt’s view, only “so-called” transformations and “so-called” correspondences. Chen equally fails to ask how the “core of the political idea” as “the morally demanding decision” figures in the life’s work of the thinker who wrote *The Concept of the Political*. For this thinker, as a result of the increasing “incapacity for God” of our age, if “the theological disappears [...] so does the political” (Schmitt 1934, 82; see Meier 1998, 13). For Schmitt, therefore, the modern separation of the spiritual and the worldly, of pure faith and impure politics is merely another hubristic attempt to neutralize the truth (Schmitt 1970, 107), since for him there is nothing more important than to answer “the call of God” at any given moment in history. “We are being tested now by the God who is present” whether we are capable of “the morally demanding decision” (Schmitt 1950a, 114).

Chen’s efforts to present Schmitt as a neutrally observing scientist are not directed against the “attempt to demonize Schmitt by religious means” (Chen, 154). On the contrary, Chen fears that by grounding Schmitt’s political action in his Christian faith, “the political burden on the name of Schmitt is shaken off”—a reference to his Nazi past (160). But particularly in the light of events since 2001, how can Chen think that faith, be it Schmitt’s faith or the faith of a suicide terrorist, is capable of freeing anyone of the responsibility for murderous deeds?

However that may be, Chen's article is expressly directed against Heinrich Meier's interpretation of Schmitt. Meier's books have set the standard not only because they were the first to draw on the entirety of Schmitt's work, but because they were also the first to account for the obscurities, turns and contradictions that abound in Schmitt's writings, to take on the difficulties and incoherencies that previous interpretations had ignored and that an interpretation like Chen's feels justified to ignore yet again. In his two books, *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: The Hidden Dialogue* (Meier 1995) and *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt* (Meier 1998), Meier meticulously documents his philosophic interpretation of Schmitt as a political theologian whose life's work is motivated by his faith in revelation. Chen acknowledges Meier's "groundbreaking work" as a "detailed, forceful, and provocative analysis" (Chen, 160)—yet holds, without himself making the effort of going into any detail or refuting any of Meier's textual proofs, that Meier gets it all wrong, "conjuring up" a "deep and real meaning" that is not there by not limiting himself to the "statements on the surface" of Schmitt's texts (Chen, 154). By reminding Meier, editor of the German edition of the writings of Leo Strauss and the author of a book on *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem* (Meier 2006), of Strauss's hermeneutic maxim that "the problem inherent in the surface of things, and only in the surface of things, is the heart of things" (Strauss 1958, 13), Chen sets a high standard for himself: he implicitly raises the claim that his interpretation is more in the spirit of Strauss's close reading than Meier's.

Yet Chen's interpretation is based on a highly selective reading of only four of Schmitt's works—*Political Theology*, *Political Theology II* (from which he quotes one single statement), *The Concept of the Political* (the translated second version only), and "Ethic of State and Pluralistic State" (from which he also quotes just once)—as opposed to Meier's analysis of Schmitt's entire oeuvre. Chen justifies his method with the claim that "when we look beyond *Political Theology*, we do not find in Schmitt substantial changes regarding the meaning of political theology" as Chen understands it (Chen, 159). But Schmitt, in his essay "The Completed Reformation" alone, uses the term "political theology" five times (Schmitt 1965). For someone who claims the authority of Strauss to be on his side, Chen understands Strauss's statement as artlessly as he understands Schmitt, forgetting that there is a *problem* inherent in the surface. Strauss never said that only the clearest, most explicit statements constitute the surface—and even less that one sentence in a text makes up the surface of the entire text. To the contrary, Strauss claimed that the most important things might only be hinted at,



might be said in a different thinker's name, in the form of a contradiction or omitted altogether. Every word, clear or obtuse, of the surface has to be taken into account, as well as the entire surface of a thinker's work.

Precisely by following closely the entire surface of Schmitt's texts a reader unwilling to overlook difficulties will discover an abundance of problems: omissions, contradictions, deliberate false quotations of even the titles of his own works, biting polemics, covert hints and traces. Reading Schmitt is detective work: if *Political Theology* were a scientific sociological book, it would be unusual that it does not even, contrary to Chen's claim, define its title-giving concept, but instead leaves it to the reader to understand what Schmitt means by "political theology" from the mere three times he uses the term in his book. The omission of any definition becomes even more curious when one considers that until 1922, when Schmitt first raised its flag, "political theology" was used differently from how it came to be used after Schmitt's book. Contrary to what Chen implies, there had never before existed a positive concept by the name of "Christian political theology" to designate political action or theory based on Christian faith (Chen, 160). How then, and why, did Schmitt, to quote his friend, the theologian Erik Peterson, come to be the one "to introduce the term [political theology] into literature" (Peterson 1994, 81)? How did Schmitt provide the foundation for the veritable career this term has since enjoyed? For an interpretation of Schmitt's thought and intention, a look at the history of the term, the long way it has come down to our usage of it today, is indispensable.

The term political theology goes back to its classical presentation in M. Terentius Varro's "theologia tripertita"—the division of theology into mythical, natural and political corresponding to the gods as introduced by the poets, the philosophers and the statesmen, respectively (Augustinus: *De civitate Dei* VI.12). With this distinction the philosopher Varro raises the question of the truth of these theologies: while political and mythical theology, in contrast to natural theology, serve a necessary purpose in founding and governing a political community, their claims are not true. Augustine, to whom we owe most of what we know regarding Varro's writings, held this against the Roman pontiff (*pontifex*) Scaevola: to publicly purport for political purposes what he did not believe to be true—in the face of the truth of revelation. Ever since Augustine's accusation against the pagan pontiff "political theology" had been used to decry the use of a false theology for political ends. Having been turned into an expression of moral contempt by

Augustine, no believer in revelation would have made use of it to designate his own position.

No believer until Schmitt, that is—in 1922. In 1871, nearly 1500 years after Augustine, the Russian anarchist Michail Bakunin, fighting in the name of Satan against God, uses the term to decry *The Political Theology of Mazzini* in his so titled book (Bakunin 1961). In Bakunin Schmitt recognizes the “real enemy of all traditional concepts of western European civilization,” rebelling openly against all forms of authority and order, human and divine, in order to propel humankind into a “Babylonian unity” of “pure this-worldliness” that denies all transcendence (see Schmitt 1934, 64 f.; Meier 1998, 6 ff.). Using the term political theology as a weapon to attack all claims to divine authority in the name of an ever-rebellious natural anarchy, Bakunin, in Schmitt’s view, by denying the legitimacy of a divine order, denies what solely is *right*. It is from this atheist revolutionary, the enemy, that Schmitt takes the term—and makes it his own by making it affirmative: yes, political theology indeed means faith-based political action, for the God of revelation is the highest sovereign authority. But since Schmitt does not mention the title of Bakunin’s book attacking political theology anywhere in his writings, it takes some detective work in order to trace Schmitt’s title back to its origin. Meier was the first to follow Schmitt’s hints: In the 1922 (first) version of *Political Theology*, Schmitt refers to an essay “written at the same time,” which became *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*. There Schmitt writes of Bakunin’s “fight” against Mazzini: for Bakunin, “the freemason Mazzini’s faith in God was, just as all faith in God, only proof of slavery” (Schmitt 1923, 75; see Meier 1998, 8 f.). Bakunin, fighting Church and State, uses the term as the most scathing indictment of Mazzini, who supports God and State; Schmitt disarms Bakunin by turning Bakunin’s accusation into a positive term to designate Schmitt’s own position—a position that knows it is based on faith and that wants to be based on faith in revelation because it believes in its *truth*. The meaning of the term as we use it today, freed of the accusation of lying and (self-)deception, is the direct result of Schmitt’s redefining appropriation of it in his book of 1922.

But Schmitt does something more complicated than this: while turning political theology into a positive term, he also keeps the meaning of political theology as a term of attack and adjusts it to his own purposes. When speaking of “the political theology of the Restoration time” (Schmitt 1934, 56), of “my political theology” and the distinction of friend and enemy as “the criterion of the political and political theology” (Schmitt

1970, epilogue, 116), he uses the term to designate the grounding of political action in true faith in revelation. But when speaking of other positions that do not agree with his—be they atheistic, humanitarian, liberal, philosophic, or other politico-theological positions that arrive at different doctrines from his own—he considers these positions to be political theologies as well; the last sentence of *Political Theology* turns Bakunin's term of attack against Mazzini back against Bakunin himself: Schmitt there calls his atheistic opponent “the *theologian* of the anti-theological” (my italics). In the same vein, Schmitt writes reverently about Donoso Cortés, who “in his radical spirituality only always sees the *theology of the opponent*” (Schmitt 1950b, 79), because he knows, just like Schmitt, of “the metaphysical core of *all* politics” (Schmitt 1934, 65, my italics), even of the politics that *deny* all metaphysics—because, as Schmitt claims, “metaphysics is something unavoidable” (Schmitt 1922, 23; see Meier 1998, 43). Thus, Schmitt launches invectives against the “religion of technology” and the “pseudo-religion of absolute humanity” (Schmitt 1950b, 108)—against, in other words, the “political theologies” that are politically rebellious by turning man into their God.

Considering himself *and* his opponents, believers and nonbelievers, friends and enemies alike political theologians is not simply a polemical attempt at unmasking the opponent, but a consequence of Schmitt's own position. Since he believes himself to know that there is *no* knowledge of the good outside the truth of faith in revelation, *any* position that is not one of the *right* faith for him is still a position of faith, only of the *wrong* faith, a faith with specific beliefs about “God, freedom, progress, the anthropological ideas of human nature,” about the good and the bad, right and wrong. Whatever position one may take—whether one believes, like Schmitt, in “the unlosable secret of the divine origin of man” (Schmitt 1950b, 78) or in a natural origin of mankind—all positions amount to “an anthropological profession of *faith*” (Schmitt 1963, 58). With actions based on belief rather than on knowledge, the liberal defender of individual freedom, the Marxist revolutionary working towards the world State, and the philosopher living a contemplative life withdrawn from political action are all equally political theologians in the sense that, according to Schmitt, they all make their decisions based on *faith* or belief: there is no escaping from making decisions, and decisions reveal what the decider *believes* he is free or obliged to do or to not do.

Schmitt believes himself to know that there is no escaping political theology, that there is no fundamental *alternative* to challenge

political theology. Any position, no matter how trans-political or anti-theological it claims to be, is as inevitably political, falling on either side of Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction, as Schmitt asserts that it is based on some kind of faith, on a decision that can never defend itself solely on the ground of reason. Every faith of this kind is measured against Schmitt's own faith in the sovereignty of the Christian God. Believing that God's authority cannot be questioned by man without committing the sin of self-deification, that the whole process of "so-called secularization" amounts to sinful rebellion, Schmitt's frame of reference is distinctly moral. Schmitt's world is one of faith against faith, where "spirit fights against spirit," where the spirit of good fights the spirit of evil, the spirit of obedience fights the spirit of disobedience (Schmitt 1963, 95). In Bakunin's *decision* against God, in his *decision* against decision and authority, his *belief* in the goodness of human nature, his own political theology comes to light. But for Schmitt, not only a political activist like Bakunin, but also a political philosopher like Rousseau is subject to the measure of Schmitt's true political theology: Rousseau's attempt to demonstrate that he can know the nature of man by the use of his unaided reason repeats the Fall as rebellion against divine authority and commandment. Schmitt cannot allow for the existence of political philosophy since a position of faith cannot allow for the truth of a position that claims *not* to be based on *faith* but on actual human *knowledge*. If the only relevant source of wisdom is revelation, philosophy is not only impossible, but it is the gravest human hubris and self-delusion. It is a sin for man to deny God as the sovereign source of all good. "How does he know that man is good," Schmitt quotes Donoso Cortés, "if God has not told him?" (Schmitt 1934, 74)

Theologians in his time correctly understood *Political Theology* as the work of a self-described political theologian and saw that Schmitt indeed, as Erik Peterson put it, "introduced the term [political theology] into literature." In 1935, a year after the publication of the second, slightly altered version of *Political Theology*, Peterson responds to Schmitt with a book that denies the possibility of all Christian political theology after the Trinity—a politico-theological rebuttal of Schmitt's political involvement with the Nazis in form of a supposedly "purely theological" treatment of Eusebius (Peterson 1994). Schmitt returns the attack 35 years later with *Political Theology II*, its subtitle—*The Legend of the Disposal of Every Political Theology*—directed against Peterson. Far from presenting a theorem of secularization, Schmitt argues theologically that the very concept of the Trinity allows for a concept of "stasis" understood as upheaval and enmity within the Trinity itself. To be sure: Erik Peterson is not an enemy of Schmitt, for Peterson holds, like

Schmitt, that “the liberal thesis that politics and theology have nothing to do with each other” is itself only a “concrete political attitude” that includes “a certain theological position”—which happens to be “heretical” (Peterson 2004).

Even before Peterson, Alfred de Quervain, a Calvinist theologian, in 1931 publishes *The Theological Presuppositions of Politics: Foundational Lines of a Political Theology* in response to Schmitt, taking up Schmitt's term exactly as Schmitt uses it: “Schmitt sees through the high-handedness of the morality and of the weltanschauung and of the power relations which are consolidated in themselves and assert themselves. Here the *knowledge of God's sovereignty* is not pushed aside. It is the presupposition” (de Quervain 1931, 168; see Meier 1998, 92). With a clear eye for who his friends are, de Quervain understands that Schmitt's *Political Theology*—with its subtitle *Four Chapters on the Doctrine of Sovereignty*—asserts nothing less than the sovereignty of the Christian God. It is a sovereignty that cannot be adequately obeyed by sticking to a “merely human” morality or set of norms: “Theology deals with the full reality of man; it is not the systematic working out of timeless truths. If it falls prey to this intellectualist urge, it turns into a metaphysical system, it becomes unhistorical. Theology and political knowledge [...] are inseparable” (de Quervain 1931, 11). In Schmitt's words: “Christianity is in its core not a morality and not a doctrine [...], but a historical event of infinite, unpossessible, unoccupiable uniqueness” (Schmitt 1950c, 930).

Although Chen affirms that “the theory of sovereignty is the subject matter of Schmitt's political theology” (Chen, 159), he does not understand the intention with which Schmitt makes sovereignty the central issue. For Schmitt, whoever raises the question of sovereignty on its most serious and demanding level cannot avoid asking who the true, the ultimate authority is in the face of the conflicting claims of authority man encounters in the realm of politics. In his words, found on the very surface of *Political Theology II*: “Whoever decides *in concreto* [...] the question what is spiritual and what is worldly and how do we deal with the *res mixtae* that simply, in the Interim between the arrival and the return of the Lord, make up the entire existence on earth of this spiritual-worldly, spiritual-temporal being that is *man*?” (Schmitt 1970, 107). Or, in the words of Leo Strauss in his lecture “Reason and Revelation”: “human guidance or divine guidance. *Tertium non datur*” (first published in Meier 2006, 149).

Whoever thinks about the source of guidance by which to take one's bearings in life must think about what constitutes authority or

sovereignty rightly understood. Precisely because faith in revelation claims it has the right and authoritative answer, one cannot ignore its claims. Political philosophers from Aristotle to Hobbes, from Avicenna to Nietzsche have addressed implicitly or explicitly the *problem* that is presented by the demand for obedience to the highest divine authority (a personal, loving and punishing sovereign authority in history that is not identical with a metaphysical concept, as Chen claims). For Schmitt, the Biblical claim to God's sovereignty is never a question or a problem, but the authoritative *answer* from the very start. To defend the truth of revelation as the decisive event in history, to salvage the moral seriousness guaranteed by the divine demand for obedience that alone seems to protect human life from slipping into a meaningless quest for pleasure and entertainment, to defend the sovereignty of the Christian God in an "age of neutralizations and depoliticizations" (Schmitt 1963, 79), to point to the divinely installed order that since the advent of Christ in history must ground all *legitimate* juridical order—that is Schmitt's intention. It is his intention not because he considers it politically useful, but true. How else can one understand his claim that "the denial of original sin destroys all political order" (Schmitt 1933, 45; see Meier 1998, 81 ff.)? The denial of this fundamental doctrine of faith in revelation—a doctrine unknown, for example, to the political order of the Greeks, in whom Schmitt shows no interest at all—can destroy all political order only if the political order is conceived of as a theological order. In what fashion does Schmitt conceive of the political order as theological and of the theological order as political?

"The real political distinction is the distinction between friend and enemy"—this is how Schmitt opens the little-known third and final version of his most famous work, *The Concept of the Political*. According to Chen, Schmitt's intention is simply to state "a plain truth in politics that there is neither constant enemy nor perpetual friend" (Chen, 153). This plain and simple truth would hardly have gained Schmitt's work the fame it received. If all Schmitt did was state the obvious, why did it take him three versions of *The Concept of the Political* to do so—the first one published in 1927, the second one in 1932, and the third one in 1933—with each version differing significantly from the previous one? Why did Leo Strauss's philosophical criticism of Schmitt's second version in 1932 show, according to Schmitt, a better understanding of Schmitt's intention than any other interpretation, and why did it lead Schmitt to his most radical, most unguarded formulations in the most stringent third version? And why, when *The Concept of the Political* was republished in 1963, did Schmitt choose to reprint the theoretically inferior second version, not giving so much as a hint that there ever had

been a third one? Chen, unbothered by these problems, takes into account only the second version, ignoring both the “surface” constituted by the three versions of *The Concept of the Political* as well as Schmitt’s explicit statement that *The Concept of the Political* is not a “plain truth,” but the “encadration of an unfathomable problem” (Schmitt 1963, 13). Why is the distinction between friend and enemy and hence the political such a problem, possibly an unsolvable problem, for Schmitt?

Heinrich Meier’s approach in his book *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: The Hidden Dialogue* because it traces the changes, clarifications, and radicalizations Schmitt undertakes throughout the course of the three versions gets to the heart of what Schmitt calls the common “criterion of the political and political theology”: the distinction between friend and enemy. The distinction between friend and enemy is itself a *politico-theological* distinction, and the political theologian in Schmitt’s self-understanding, as opposed to a sociologist of secularization, thinks of others in terms of friend and enemy. When Schmitt sets out to defend what he calls his *Concept of the Political* for the first time in 1927, liberalism is on the rise, characterized by a parliament that “is a permanent debating club” and a doctrine that replaces the personally responsible political decision with a set of legal norms that claim to be of universal legitimacy: “In the systematics of liberal thought that still definitely prevail today,” Schmitt says, the political is “robbed, with special pathos, of all validity and subordinated to the normative prescriptions and ‘orders’ of morals, law, and economics” (Schmitt 1927, 3 f., 29; see Meier 1995, 21 f.).

Going against what he calls *Political Romanticism* (Schmitt 1919, 1925), yet still far from proclaiming “the political as the total” as he does in the preface of the 1934 re-edition of *Political Theology* in referring to the final third version of *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt, with seeming modesty, asks liberalism to grant the “domain of the political” merely equal status with the other existing domains of the economic, the aesthetic, the legal and the moral. How to make “the correct distinction of friend and enemy” if the enemy is not the one who is morally bad, economically harmful, aesthetically ugly, or breaking the law is a problem circumvented by the possibility that the enemy may simply be an attacking state. This would suggest that the seriousness of the enemy has its reason in the “real possibility of physical killing” (Schmitt 1963, 33), in the ever-present possibility of war. And it would in part excuse Chen for thinking that Schmitt states nothing but a plain truth: states have to be prepared for deadly enemies. But the political is not constituted by

the threat of physical killing. Schmitt states that the enemy in the case of conflict means the “negation of one’s own way of existence and therefore needs to be fended off or fought in order to preserve one’s own, existential way of life” (Schmitt 1933, 32; see Meier 1998, 53). The seriousness of the enemy does not have its reason in the danger of losing one’s *life*—this would be the bourgeois position Schmitt despises—but in the danger of losing a distinct *way of life* that makes up one’s existential and not merely one’s physical being. Does Schmitt consider the enemy as enemy to the way of life of a particular nation as shaped by its particular tradition and laws, a way of life that any nation has a right to defend? Is Schmitt a theorist of nationalism?

The second version of 1932 makes clearer than the first version that this is not so. As Meier points out, Schmitt is not a nationalist, nor is the distinction between friend and enemy limited to relations between states. In the second version, the political is no longer one *domain* among others, such as the moral and the legal, but a *degree of intensity*: “the sense of denoting the most extreme degree of intensity of a bond or separation, of an association or dissociation”—within the state just as much as between states (Schmitt 1963, 38; see Meier 1998, 29 ff.). Hereby Schmitt shows what he had in mind from the very beginning: the political is the *horizon*, “the authoritative case,” for all other domains that can all become political. In the words of Schmitt: the “point of the political” can be reached from within any domain as the “most intensive and extreme opposition.” In consequence, *everything* is at all times *more or less* political, every (economic) relationship, (juridical) tension or (moral) conflict within the state can transform itself into the “most intensive and extreme opposition.” Severed from its link to an existing political community, the political “springs up” wherever two people join forces in their will to oppose a third, and the more this association is defined by what Schmitt calls the “dire emergency,” the “more political” it is. The political entity is *not* a State or a nation *fixed* by legal convention or by natural development, but *varies* with its effectiveness in distinguishing between friend and enemy in times of emergency. If the political unit is the “authoritative unit, total and sovereign” and man is “wholly and existentially grasped in political participation”—if man’s *soul* is political in its deepest nature—and if the political association in which he “participates” is constituted by the dire emergency, what does Schmitt understand by the dire emergency (Schmitt 1933, 21 f; see Meier 1998, 35 f.)?

Certainly “the reference to the possibility of physical killing” does not determine the dire emergency and make the enemy existentially



real. Fear of violent death, Schmitt holds against Hobbes, is not able to grasp man as man wholly and determine him most deeply. People are willing to die for political goals, for a way of life; people are willing to die for what they think is *right*, or they are capable of forgoing life under circumstances that deny them the way of life that they have understood to be the best one. Fear of death cannot account for why Schmitt conceives of “the political as the total.” In the 1933 version of *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt makes this clear beyond doubt by distinguishing the *agonal* from the *political*. The agonal position—one of its famous representatives is Ernst Jünger—understands conflict and war as immanent and belonging to nature, as cyclical recurrences of an underlying eternal order. Schmitt ridicules the agonal idea of enmity as one pertaining to animals that lack knowledge of good and evil—the cat is the natural, the agonal enemy of the mouse (Schmitt 1955, 149 f.). Enmity for Schmitt is nothing that has its cause in nature or in natural beings’ will to power. Man is not an animal without a truth to fight for, and the dire emergency cannot be caused by natural agonal conflict. The *political* position perceives of enmity as something that “transcends the natural by far”: enmity is the result of a supernatural event in history resulting from an intentional division of the world into good and evil. The “political task” consists in fighting against enemies perceived of as evil for the establishment of the “true moral order”—a moral order that requires a “morally demanding decision” to be brought into being. The first version describes the political as the “ability to distinguish between friend and enemy” (Schmitt 1927, 10). The third version clarifies the political as the “*task to distinguish correctly between friend and enemy*” (Schmitt 1933, 16; my italics).

If the political as the distinction between friend and enemy is to grasp every human being wholly and totally, then finding the enemy is an existential task that no one is free to escape. For Schmitt, much depends on the correct identification of the enemy—not only to protect oneself and one’s association, but to preserve one’s individual identity that is determined by whom one recognizes as one’s enemy: “Tell me who your enemy is and I will tell you who you are” (Schmitt 1991, 243). Is the understanding of the political motivated ultimately by Schmitt’s desire to know himself? Is the political sphere in which the question of the enemy arises a means to that end?

Schmitt is indeed concerned with the possibility of self-deception. But the radical and systematic questioning of everything one believes is not Schmitt’s way, nor is it his intention in confronting this

danger. On the contrary, Schmitt polemicizes against the activity of solitary contemplation as a way of investigating the question of what is right and what is wrong. For Schmitt it is unquestionable that “self-deception is part of solitude” (Schmitt 1950b, 87; see Meier 1998, 45 f.). Not to gain self-knowledge in the Socratic way by examining the conflicting claims that arise in the sphere of the political, but to avoid self-deception as the greatest moral danger, Schmitt believes he must turn to the sphere of political action. The *question* of the right life, which is at the outset of the quest for self-knowledge, is never posed since Schmitt knows the *answer* from the very beginning: the right life consists in historical, moral *action* and not trans-historical, trans-moral *contemplation*, which in Schmitt’s frame of mind would equal a moral transgression: questioning the truth of the “morally demanding decision.”

The sphere of political action for Schmitt is essentially historical, as he outlines in his article “Three Possibilities of a Christian View of History” (Schmitt 1950c). But history for Schmitt is the realm of Providence, and must be understood as a state in which man is being tested and tried. Since Schmitt claims that every historical truth is true only once—the “structure of the historical” is the concrete “uniqueness of everything historical”—the real enemy may change with any new historical constellation, constantly appearing in a deceptive new guise (*ibid.*, 153). But if the nature of the enemy is deception, the enemy cannot be known. Schmitt attempts to solve this problem by making a virtue out of the absence of necessity by which the enemy can be known: the enemy must *necessarily* be the one who denies the necessity of enmity. This quasi-nature of the enemy that Schmitt construes remains unchangeable throughout all historical changes and deceptions: hence it is not true only once. Schmitt needs to limit the unknowability of the ever-deceptive enemy as a figure of Providence in order to salvage his political theology as a guide for concrete political action. If he wishes to hold on to the highest certainty that surpasses all merely human certainties and securities and gives his life an ultimate meaning—that there is a moral order to the universe, ruled over by an omnipotent God who has divided it into good and evil—Schmitt has to resort to this trick in order to be able to translate his faith into concrete political actions against whom he has identified as the enemy.

Yet how can Schmitt be sure that this attempt to identify the enemy is not an act of self-deception based on a false certainty? If Schmitt is afraid of illusion more than anything else and repulsed by deception more than anything else, yet if the enemy is a master of deception and if everything

depends on the right decision in the face of historical uncertainty, then what prevents Schmitt from deceiving himself in thinking that the enemy is always the one who denies the importance of enmity? "All deception is self-deception. [...] But the enemy is an objective power [...] and the real enemy cannot be deceived" (Schmitt 1950b, 89). The real enemy must have knowledge about Schmitt that Schmitt himself does not have. He has the power of calling Schmitt into question that Schmitt would not have on his own. Whence comes this power of knowledge that the enemy has?

Instead of giving a direct answer, Schmitt answers in the form of an example: the moments when "the enemy is seen with the utmost clarity" make for the "peaks of politics" (Schmitt 1933, 48 f.; see Meier 1998, 58). In order to illustrate what a historical high point of great politics is, Schmitt refers to Oliver Cromwell's *speech* against papal Spain of September 17, 1656. In this speech, Cromwell gives the reason how he has come to *know the enemy*; he reveals that identifying the enemy has its basis in a metaphysical knowledge. The Spaniard's "enmity is put into him by God." He is "the providential enemy." Whoever considers Spain an accidental enemy does not know God, who has said: "I will put enmity between your seed and her seed." To these quotations from Cromwell Schmitt adds the explicit reference to Genesis III:15, referring the reader to the biblical account of the Fall and God's sovereign decision to bring enmity into the world (Schmitt 1963, 67; 1933, 49; see Meier 1989, 57). The providential enemy is my brother because God wills it so. This is why Schmitt knows that he himself is inevitably an enemy to someone else, and why he himself wants to be an enemy to whoever does not believe in revealed providential enmity: "Woe to him who has no *enemy*, for I will be his enemy on Judgment Day" (Schmitt 1950b, 90). The enemy's existence and identity, in Schmitt's political theology, must be of the highest concern for any believer who takes his bearings by the revealed truth. The peak of enmity is religious war—faith fighting against errant faith—and the paradigm of war is civil war—brother fighting against brother. In light of Schmitt's revealed knowledge of the providential enemy, his enigmatic assertions can be understood: "Spirit fights against spirit, life against life, and from the power of an integral knowledge rises the order of human things" (Schmitt 1963, 95).

Schmitt's knowledge of enmity is his belief in revelation. It is the knowledge of divine providence in history, of the "real, ever-present and necessary eschatology" (Schmitt 1950a, 76). It is the belief in history as the "state of test and trial" in which man must attempt to answer the "call

of God”: “Do what you must, it has always been done already and you are only answering” (Schmitt 1950b, 53). The distinction between friend and enemy is not a “plain truth,” as Chen claims, but the “central concept of any great politics” that needs to be understood and adhered to through all the “deceiving and deceptive concealments” that the providential enemy may hide behind. The “great historical and significant distinction between friend and enemy” has to be found “behind the day-to-day politics” (Schmitt 1950a, 78). What conceals itself behind everyday politics is the ever-present possibility of the ultimate historical, the ultimate political event—the *dire emergency* in the strongest sense—in the form of the “fight between atheism and Christianity” (ibid., 75).

Is this the supposed “theoretician of pure politics” speaking? Schmitt’s insistence on enmity instead of peace, on the necessity of the concrete political decision answering the call of God, is the core of his political theology. As such Schmitt must understand his own theoretical activity as an expression of his obedience, his own concrete way of answering the call in an age that is becoming increasingly incapable of hearing it. Schmitt sees his task in keeping alive the knowledge of divinely revealed enmity amid all “Babylonian” hopes to bring humanity together on a common, fully neutralized ground. Because it is out of the question for Schmitt to radically *question* what may be the right way of life, the nature and origin of the political and what may precede and transcend it, he equates his “knowledge” with his “faith,” his “participation,” his “obedience.” But can faith, participation, obedience take the place of self-knowledge, or is any concrete decision Schmitt takes essentially “blind”? What happens when one realizes that one has failed at the task of identifying the enemy correctly—that one has involuntarily even helped the forces of evil, or harmed a friend? What happens when, like Schmitt throughout the course of his life, one has made political decisions that include support for the Catholic Church in the 1920s, for the Nazis in the ’30s, for partisan warfare in the ’60s? How does Schmitt, looking back, judge his own “concrete,” i.e. ever-changing, political decisions?

The most extensive treatment of this problem can be found in Schmitt’s interpretation of Thomas Hobbes, on whom Schmitt wrote several texts crucial for understanding his position as a political theologian. Schmitt’s understanding of Hobbes became more and more favorable over time, and he never regarded Hobbes as an enemy like Spinoza—Schmitt calls the “sive” in *Deus sive natura* the “most audacious insult ever to be inflicted upon God and man” (Schmitt 1991, 28; see Meier 1998, 97)—but always as

a friend for whose “soul he prays” (Schmitt 1950b, 67; see Meier 1998, 100). Influenced by the interpretation of Leo Strauss, Schmitt went from calling Hobbes “by far the greatest and possibly the only truly systematic *political* thinker” in the first version of *The Concept of the Political* to merely “a great and truly systematic thinker” in the final version in 1933—thereby subtly implying that Hobbes did not share Schmitt’s understanding of the political. How then is it possible to exempt Hobbes from Schmitt’s scathing criticism of the “anti-godly self-deification” he sees as inherent in individualism and liberalism? These are the very political doctrines for which Hobbes’s teaching is responsible more than any other thinker’s, as Strauss had demonstrated in his critique of Schmitt, “Notes on *The Concept of the Political*” (see Meier 1995). How can a thinker who teaches violent death as the greatest of all evils in order to turn fear of violent death into an instrument to support the liberal secular State not be an enemy of the thinker of the “morally demanding decision” that overcomes all concerns for self-preservation in order to fight for the right *nomos*? How can the enabler of the bourgeois way of life in a “community of culture and consumption,” the exploiter of man’s need for “peace and security,” be Schmitt’s *friend* for whom he prays?

By showing Schmitt that the political order envisioned by Hobbes would prepare the way for the nonpolitical life of entertainment which Schmitt abhorred, Strauss had indirectly accused Schmitt of not knowing who his enemy was. Schmitt’s book *The Leviathan in the Teaching of State of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol*, written in 1938 (Schmitt 1938; see Meier 1989, 100 ff.), can be read as an answer to Strauss’s 1932 criticism, an interpretation that Schmitt radicalized 27 years later in his last work on Hobbes, “The Completed Reformation” (Schmitt 1965; see Meier 1998, 119 ff.). Schmitt begins his book on the *Leviathan* with Strauss’s interpretation of Hobbes—or with what Schmitt pretends to be Strauss’s interpretation—and has Strauss introduce the distinction between politics and religion that Schmitt himself opposes.

Schmitt says that Strauss wrote in his 1930 *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion* “that Hobbes regards the Jews as the real authors of the seditious, State-destructive distinction between religion and politics,” between “worldly and religious power which was foreign to the pagans according to Hobbes because for them religion was a part of politics” (Schmitt 1938, 21; see Meier 1998, 109 ff.). But then Schmitt silently supplements Strauss’s words by writing: “the Jews *achieved* unity from the religious side. Only the Roman papal church and the power-hungry Presbyterian churches or sects

live off the State-destructive severance of religious and worldly power [...] The battle against the ‘Kingdom of Darkness’ striven for by the Roman papal church, the *restoration of the original unity*, is, as Leo Strauss observes, the real meaning of Hobbes’s political theory. That is right.”

In fact, that is not right. This is not Strauss’s interpretation of Hobbes, and it is a glaring misquotation of Strauss’s words. Strauss does *not* write that Hobbes is writing against the Catholic Church, but that Hobbes thinks that *revelation as such*, be it Jewish or Christian, Protestant or Catholic, “makes politics a part of religion: thus—as we understand Hobbes—it reverses the natural relationship which was realized in paganism.” The distinction all revelation makes between the lower worldly laws and the higher spiritual laws is, so Strauss understands Hobbes, “absurd” and has its origin in “superstition.” As Strauss writes in his 1954 article on Hobbes, the political consequence of revelation, “the dualism of power temporal and power spiritual [...] is incompatible with peace, the demand *par excellence* of reason” (Strauss 1959, 188). In light of the political consequences of revelation, the question that presents itself to Hobbes in the sphere of politics is whether it is *right* that politics become a part of religion. The answer solely depends on the question of the *right way of life*, or, in other words, it solely depends on whether revelation is *true* or not. In the words of Strauss, the alternative is clear: “supremacy of politics or revelation.” In Schmitt’s version, Strauss’s and Hobbes’s philosophically radical either-or, which raises the question of truth and supremacy, has disappeared into an “original unity” that obscures all issues of truth and incompatibility.

Besides Strauss, Schmitt also quotes the German political thinker Helmut Schelsky, who in his essay “The Totality of the State in Hobbes” interpreted Hobbes as fighting “against all political theology in every form”—political theology understood in the sense Schmitt had introduced, as political thought taking its bearings by faith in revelation (Schelsky 1938; see Meier 1998, 111 f.). Although Schmitt quotes Schelsky’s position correctly, he is perfectly silent about the fact that Schelsky’s essay on Hobbes is an explicit attack on none other than Carl Schmitt’s political theology. It becomes obvious what Schmitt is doing; in order not to confront Hobbes’s political theory in his own name, exposing his own position, he uses Strauss and Schelsky to provide the question that guides his *Leviathan* interpretation. If Hobbes was indeed trying to re-establish the “original political unity” of religion and politics (supposedly Strauss’s claim) from the side of politics “against all political theology” (Schelsky’s claim), did he succeed in doing so?

In more explicit words: Did Hobbes succeed in making Christian revelation a merely useful tool in the hands of a worldly authority? If Schmitt can show that Hobbes did *not* succeed in making revelation a mere means to the end of worldly peace and security, then the demonstration of the failure of Hobbes's supposed intention would serve him as proof for the superiority of political theology—and the superiority of revelation over all attempts at “so-called secularization.”

To cut Meier's long demonstration short: Schmitt's verdict on the failure of the Hobbesian sovereign is devastating. This must come as a surprise for anyone who thinks of Schmitt's theory as a sociological theory of secularization. Schmitt, the thinker of decision and sovereignty—derides the decision of the personal sovereign in Hobbes's political theory? Was the emphasis on sovereignty not what made Schmitt praise Hobbes originally as the only truly political thinker, a “juridical thinker,” in 1922, someone who understood that ultimately all political order was grounded not in legal norms but in a personal decision? Why then does the personal sovereign of the *Leviathan* become the object of Schmitt's polemical spite?

After what we know of Schmitt's political theology, the answer is not surprising: It is “the question of faith and miracles” that causes the downfall of the “New God,” the “rupture” in Hobbes's supposed attempt to unite religion and politics from the side of politics (Schmitt 1938, 48, 96; see Meier 1998, 108 f.). Hobbes's sovereign is sovereign only by agreement, by contract, sovereign “only in a juridical, not in a metaphysical sense” (Schmitt 1938, 52). For Schmitt, this is not enough: juridical transcendence needs metaphysical transcendence, and true authority needs metaphysical legitimacy. Hobbes's sovereign is not the *defensor pacis*, the defender of a political order and peace willed by God, but the *creator pacis*, the maker of a merely earthly political order and peace, the hybrid product of human reason and of a contract of “atomized” individuals driven by nothing but their fear for physical safety. The sovereign is not “omnipotent” because he is instituted by God, he is “omnipotent” only on earth: “Its omnipotence though is not at all of divine origin: it is the work of man” (*ibid.*, 50). The central sentence of Schmitt's *Leviathan* book sums up Schmitt's criticism of Hobbes's political conception: “But the idea of the State as a technologically perfected *magnum artificium* created by men, as a machine that has its ‘right’ and its ‘truth’ only in itself, that is, in performance and function, was first grasped and systematically developed as a clear concept by Hobbes” (Schmitt 1938, 70 f.; see Meier 1998, 126). What does someone who attempts to read this sentence as a

neutral observation of a process of “secularization” make of ‘right’ and ‘truth’ versus true right and truth? What right is ‘right’ derived from, what truth precedes the ‘truth,’ what true State does the new machine-like ‘State’ make a farce of? Schmitt criticizes Hobbes’s idea of State as an “artificial product made by men,” a “gigantic mechanism that serves to secure the *this-worldly*, physical existence of the men whom it rules and protects.” But Hobbes is not really aware of whom he is taking on. By using the “notorious, mythical image of the Leviathan” that conjures up all sorts of forces attached to it “from time immemorial,” Hobbes is in fact summoning, supposedly without being aware of it and in a “semi-ironic way,” the “evil enemy as such,” the *real* enemy. The name of the Leviathan, so Schmitt knows, “belongs after all among those mythical names that *cannot be cited without punishment*.” It is the name for “the Devil,” “Satan”—the Antichrist (Schmitt 1938, 9, 79; see Meier 1998, 107; my italics).

But, one may wonder, the Great Animal, the Machine for which Hobbes provided the blueprint has proven hugely successful—where is the punishment that was to follow from its institution? How can Schmitt not acknowledge the success of the modern form of State? The historical success of the “Great Machine” Schmitt distinguishes from what he considers the spectacular conceptual failure of the “Mortal God,” for whom “the question of faith and of miracles became the undoing” (Schmitt 1938, 63, 79 f., 90; see Meier 1998, 108). Just like God, the worldly sovereign demands “unquestioning obedience” from his subjects. But the reason he demands obedience is not that he is the only source of truth or installed by God, but that he is the sole guarantor of “peace and security” on earth. His “truth” is solely his “function.” But what if someone does not want “peace and security” above everything else, at the price of what he believes to be the truth? What if someone wants to bring about the true political order, at the cost of peace and security? Is “peace and security” not the very promise that the Apostle Paul warned of—the promise of the Antichrist?

In this context Schmitt’s initial claim that it is Hobbes’s intention to “re-establish the original unity of politics and religion” unfolds its relevance. For, according to Schmitt, in order to re-establish this unity, the worldly sovereign would need to have full power over people’s thoughts and conscience. He would need to have the power to compel on the deepest level, to prohibit the innermost belief that God’s sovereignty is above all worldly sovereignty. As Schmitt knows, “[n]othing divine can be forced externally”—and the Leviathan is equipped with nothing but force, *potestas*,



not divine *auctoritas* to reach people's innermost faith (Schmitt 1938, 94; see Meier 1998, 113). Schmitt, as becomes more clear here than anywhere else, is not the thinker of decision that interpreters like Karl Löwith have made him to be. Schmitt in fact ridicules "Hobbes, the great decisionist" and his "typically decisionist turn: *Autoritas, non Veritas*. [...] Nothing here is true, everything here is command. A miracle is what the sovereign State power commands should be believed to be a miracle; but also—and ridicule suggests itself at this point particularly—the reverse: miracles cease when the State forbids them" (ibid. 82 f.; see Meier 1998, 112).

By keeping, as he does, "the inward thought, and belief of men" out of the reach of the sovereign, Hobbes allows for a "point of rupture" in the supposedly desired "unity of politics and religion," a rupture that will become the "seed of death" for the Leviathan. It can neither fulfill the deepest desire of man nor protect him against the terror that comes from beyond. But where man is not wholly grasped, where "the political" is not "the total," the command of the artificial sovereign falls short and, so we learn, "the ultimate superiority of the internal over the external, of the invisible over the visible, of the quiet over the loud, of the other world over the secular world" asserts itself (Schmitt 1938, 95; see Meier 1998, 113). Whoever wants to call Schmitt a theoretician of "secularization" must admit that Schmitt wants to demonstrate that this process of "neutralization of the truth" is not only sinful and ultimately useless rebellion against the revealed truth, but that man's self-empowerment as embodied in the Leviathan will, like the Leviathan himself, find its end with the Second Coming of Christ. "The meaning of all history," so Schmitt knows, "is, after all, salvation" (Schmitt 1954, 49).

In 1938, Schmitt demonstrates that the inventor of the Leviathan is not a political thinker in Schmitt's understanding of the political. Why then does "the great decisionist" Hobbes—unlike his brainchild, the Mortal God—not become the target of Schmitt's derision? Why does he allow Hobbes to get away with his political conception that encourages the forgetting of enmity and a bourgeois life of nonpolitical entertainment more than any other thinker before him? Because Schmitt *believes* that Hobbes, unlike Spinoza, did not *intend* to bring about the historical consequences his "Machine with a Soul," once on autopilot, did bring forth. For one thing, Schmitt believes he knows that Hobbes kept the "innermost thought and beliefs" of the subjects out of reach of the worldly sovereign in order to protect Christian faith. Philosophic interpretations have understood the *libertas philosophandi*—"because thought is free" (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXXVII)—as

Hobbes's deliberate attempt to protect the activity of contemplation from being persecuted by political, not to mention "ecclesiasticall" authority, but Schmitt, on the contrary, interprets it as Hobbes's "Christian reserve": "I believe that in Hobbes there was genuine piety. But his thought was no longer devout" (Schmitt 1938, 125-26; see Meier 1998, 117). What saves Hobbes in the eyes of Schmitt is one sentence, "*the most important sentence of Thomas Hobbes,*" that, far from being interpreted as Hobbes's attempt at neutralization, is "the sole principle of faith that is essential": "*that Jesus is the Christ*" (Schmitt 1938, 48; 1991, 243; see Meier 1998, 120 f.; see also Schmitt 1955, 153; my italics). A statement that in light of Hobbes's fundamental philosophic critique of *all* miracles (Strauss 1959, 185 ff.) can only coherently be understood as an exoteric assertion in the name of political prudence, a reminder directed at the warring parties that they do agree on the most important thing, an attempt at political neutralization of the conflict between Protestants and Catholics, Schmitt turns into the *culmination* of Hobbes's thought, his personal creed and deepest motivation for his political theorizing: to save Christianity from self-destruction. According to Schmitt, Hobbes *presupposed* the Christian faith and a Christian sovereign, and he really intended to *strengthen* Christianity in the only way he thought to be possible in his time of confessional war. That his "*machina machinarum*" became the vehicle of privatization and "neutralization" of Christian faith rather than its safeguard is a historical development that Hobbes, in Schmitt's opinion, could neither have foreseen nor intended. Hobbes's political theory is nothing but Hobbes's concrete historical response to the most pressing political conflict of the time—and ceases to be of any relevance as soon as this conflict is over.

The price Schmitt pays for his interpretation of Hobbes is to make him utterly incoherent where there is no need for him to be interpreted as incoherent. To achieve his interpretation, Schmitt has to split Hobbes arbitrarily into a pious "*vir probus,*" whose faith that *Jesus is the Christ* keeps him from allowing the sovereign access to the innermost faith of its subjects, and a philosopher, whose irreligious thought comprises a radical critique of the Bible and all miracles—with Incarnation being the greatest of all miracles—and a philosophy of a state of nature that knows neither Creation, nor obedience, nor sin. In Schmitt's interpretation, the torn thinker "Hobbes," who cannot reconcile his religious feelings with his irreligious thought, is turned into a tragic shadow of the political philosopher Hobbes, who, according to Strauss's philosophic interpretation of Hobbes, "[h]olding the view of the Bible which he did [...] was compelled to try his hand at a natural explanation of the Biblical religion" (Strauss 1959, 188).

Schmitt's interpretation of 1938 is not his last take on Hobbes. Towards the end of his life, Schmitt takes his interpretation one step further. He miraculously converts the "Hobbes" torn between non-religious thinker and "*vir probus*" into "Hobbes," the whole-hearted political theologian. The wholly politico-theological Hobbes is achieved by dropping from the picture everything that does not fit into this interpretation of Hobbes. What remains of Hobbes, the political philosopher, is Hobbes, the "*Christian Epimetheus*" "who answered to the political-historical challenge of his age with the daring feat of an 'anticipation of a commandment that is to be obeyed'" (Meier 1998, 124).

With the "Marianic view of history" that understands the task of the believer to be that of a "Christian Epimetheus," Schmitt takes up a term of "a great German poet," Konrad Weiss, and makes it central to his own political theology (Schmitt 1950c, 930). The Christian Epimetheus is diametrically opposed to the hubristic Prometheus who believes in no divine "commandment that is to be obeyed." The Christian Epimetheus has come to know as the "arcanum of ontology" that every historical truth is true only once and that "every human word is an answer" (Schmitt 1955, 148 ff.). The self-understanding of the Christian Epimetheus is that he has to make a decision concerning what he thinks the Lord of history is *calling* on him to do. Since the Christian Epimetheus bases this decision on his faith, it is a blind decision insofar as he cannot *know* Providence but can only humbly *anticipate* what God is asking of him. Any obedient action on the part of the Christian Epimetheus runs the risk of having wholly unintended historical consequences. With the figure of the Christian Epimetheus, Schmitt can explain why Hobbes effectively sped up the process of secularization when he in fact *intended to slow it down*. And the figure of the Christian Epimetheus gives Schmitt a model by which to understand himself. "Of his own case Schmitt said in the summer of 1945 that it can be called 'by a name a great poet coined. It is the bad, unworthy, and yet authentic case of a Christian Epimetheus'" (Meier 1998, 132, referring to Schmitt 1950b, 12). The Christian Epimetheus signifies the culmination and collapse of Schmitt's political theology. Since all action is necessarily blind in the face of God's almighty, inscrutable will, everything and nothing is at stake, and all Schmitt can hope for is God's grace and forgiveness in judging Schmitt's "will to obedience" or his "good intention of faith" (Meier 1998, 128).

In Schmitt's interpretation, Hobbes—"presupposing a Christian state"—dared to "blindly anticipate" the command of God by

intending the Leviathan to function as a “catechon.” The catechon Schmitt himself identifies as lying at the core of his own activity as a political theologian. The “problem of the catechon (Thess. 2,2,6)” has been, as Schmitt writes in a 1974 letter to Blumenberg, for “more than 40 years [...] *the central question of (my) political theology*” (Schmitt and Blumenberg 2007, 120; my italics). Schmitt writes this in response to Blumenberg’s interpretation of *Political Theology II* in the latter’s heavily revised edition of *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Blumenberg 1974). Schmitt “considers himself obligated” to correct Blumenberg’s interpretation of Schmitt’s position because it missed the most important point: like Chen today, Blumenberg interpreted Schmitt’s work as an elaboration of a theory of secularization. But far from a theorem of secularization, the catechon is a mysterious figure mentioned for the first time in Paul’s Second Letter to the Thessalonians. It is a historical figure that *holds up* the coming of the Antichrist by slowing down the forces of evil. If Chen had taken notice of the importance of the catechon for Schmitt in many of his writings, making its first appearance in *Land and Sea* in 1942 (Schmitt 1954), he would have been able to understand that it is as far removed from a sociological theorem of secularization as Hobbes is from being a Christian Epimetheus.

History for Schmitt is the “the Interim between the arrival and the return of the Lord” (Schmitt 1970, 107) and “history itself consists in concrete questions and answers”: “By hearing the question and the call of history and trying to answer it in their actions, human beings dare to enter the great trial of historical impact and are marked by a judgment” (Schmitt 1955, 152). Not being satisfied with human measures of providing political order, Schmitt has to believe in particular providence. Ironically, his desire for a moral order and for a certainty beyond all merely human security make Schmitt, who stakes the meaning of his life on the correct distinction between friend and enemy, on historical action to slow down the forces of providential evil, fair game for “the Antichrist.” All it takes for Hobbes to win over Schmitt is to write one pious sentence in order to get away with the irreligious “rest” of his thought. Does Schmitt’s desire to find a friend in Hobbes cloud his judgment, or is the impossibility of correctly distinguishing friend and enemy of God inherent in Schmitt’s political theology—a theory that mandates a life of historical action and that derides a life of contemplation of human problems, a theory that knows only of history and not of nature, a theory that struggles in vain to deny the existence of all necessity, a theory that forgoes human knowledge for faith in superhuman commandment, a

theory that never asks the questions: “What is virtue? What is God? What is the good?” (Meier 1998, 123)?

With his reading of Hobbes, Schmitt demonstrates what happens when “the most important question” in reading a philosopher is not to try to understand him as he understood himself, but when the only concern becomes the effect of this philosopher’s teaching in and on *history*, his role and “position in the process of so-called secularization” (Schmitt 1965, 61). Schmitt demonstrates the same concern regarding himself and his position in that very process. The Christian Epimetheus or the katechon do not need to be understood by their time in order to have the desired effect on history. On the contrary, in order to be taken seriously in an age that is characterized by an “incapacity for God,” Schmitt will be more effective if he does not give away the core of his theorizing so easily. With his style of writing Schmitt himself avoids what he considers the explanation for Donoso Cortés’s failure to be heard by his own time (Schmitt 1950a, 69).

Heinrich Meier challenges his critics to consider his interpretation of Schmitt’s Hobbes the test case for his entire interpretation of Schmitt as a political theologian—a challenge that Chen silently ignores, not referring once to Schmitt’s understanding of Hobbes. If Meier’s interpretation of Schmitt stands or falls with his reading of Schmitt’s Hobbes, more than that is at stake for Schmitt himself: if Meier’s interpretation is correct, then Schmitt’s political theology fails dramatically in its decisive respect, as it offers no concrete political guidance and no intellectual protection against falling for what he himself considers to be the deceptive game of his enemy (see Meier 1998, 170). How could political action that wants to respond to the call of history ever rule out that anything may serve the mysterious workings of the Lord (see Meier 1998, 155)?

What for political theology is an unsolvable problem, for political philosophy is an invaluable insight into its own necessity. Mistaking Carl Schmitt for a sociologist, Chen fails to see why Schmitt should be of any interest to the political philosopher Leo Strauss in 1932, or, for that matter, to anyone serious about the *question of the right life* to which Schmitt has such an unambiguous answer. In the opening paragraph of his autobiographical Preface to the American translation of *Die Religionskritik Spinozas*, Strauss in 1962 looks back on the late 1920s, calling himself “a young Jew born and raised in Germany who found himself in the grip of the theologico-political predicament” (Strauss 1968, 224). In his 1964 preface for the German edition of *Hobbes’s Political Philosophy* Strauss writes that “the theologico-political

problem has since then remained *the* theme of my studies” (Strauss 2001, 7 f.). Chen claims that with the theologico-political problem Strauss was referring to what he calls the “Jewish problem” presented by Judaism and the Jewish Law. In this vein, he claims that the term “Jerusalem and Athens”—a dualism that, in the words of Strauss, constitutes “the tension of the West”—refers only to Judaism, not Christianity or Islam, and Greek philosophy. But does it not seem highly implausible to state that Renaissance, Enlightenment and all versions of historicism are caused by the tension between *Judaism* and philosophy?

In fact, the term “Jerusalem and Athens” goes back to “the jurist and theologian Tertullian” (Schmitt 1925, 137), whose thought on the nature of law and right centers in the sovereignty of God. Tertullian famously pitted obedience against the good in a sentence translated by his fellow jurist and theologian Schmitt as “we are obliged to something not because it is good but because God commands it” (ibid.). It is an equally famous expression by Tertullian that established the meaning of the term “Jerusalem and Athens”: “Quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis? What does the Academy have to do with the Church? What do the heretics have to do with the Christians?” (Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, VII, 9–13). In Schmitt’s words, Tertullian “found the classical phrase” for the opposition between “received Christian theology” and “the system of a ‘natural’ scientificity,” an opposition as valid today as it was in the time of Tertullian (Schmitt 1963, 88; see Meier 1998, 95 f.). Both Tertullian, who most famously referred to the opposition of Athens and Jerusalem, and Carl Schmitt understand by “Jerusalem” Christian faith. But for the philosopher Strauss, Jerusalem is the city of revelation and stands for the way of life of obedience, of all faith as faith. Strauss stated many times that the fundamental difference between the way of life of the believer and the way of life of the philosopher is infinitely greater than the differences between the dogmas of the revealed religions on the one hand or the differences between the teachings of the philosophers on the other. This is why Strauss can write that the “conflict between Judaism and Christianity” for Spinoza was “a conflict [...] of no relevance for him as a philosopher” (Strauss 1968, 244).

The problem for the philosopher is not to know which of the revealed religions is the true one—although the investigation of this problem will lead to fundamental insights into the claim that the truth is something that needs to be revealed by God and cannot be discovered by reason. The problem for the philosopher is *which way of life is the right one*: the one that

takes its bearings by the highest revealed authority or the one that takes its bearings by one's own natural capacity for reason? Political philosophy stands for the way of life guided by human reason alone, whereas political theology stands for the way of life of faith. This is how Strauss understands and uses both terms—or, to be more precise, in this way he himself introduces the term “political philosophy” into literature (Meier 2006, xi–xiii). Strauss adopts “political philosophy” to describe his own position as exactly opposed in meaning to “political theology”: “We are compelled to distinguish political philosophy from political theology. By political theology we understand political teachings which are based on divine revelation” (Strauss 1959, 13). Just as Hobbes, “holding the view of the Bible which he did [...] was compelled to try his hand at a natural explanation of the Biblical religion,” so Strauss himself was compelled to do the same, because “being based on belief” is “a calamity for philosophy” (Strauss 1968, 236).

An example of Strauss's claim to provide a philosophic explanation of revelation is his text “Reason and Revelation,” which contains a genealogy of faith in revelation that demonstrates, beginning with the “need of man for law,” the transformation of a mythical law into a revealed law. And, what should come as a surprise to Chen, Strauss equally shows the transformation of the first Biblical revelation into the second Biblical revelation: Strauss, the philosopher born as a Jew, here tries his hand at a natural explanation of Christian Incarnation out of the political problems of Jewish Law (Meier 2006, 165 ff.). In the same vein Strauss had written a decade earlier, in his unfinished text “A Recollection of Lessing” from 1937, that he had “the weakness to prefer to give his attention to a Jew” but did not find any Jew in more recent times “of the freedom of mind of Lessing,” “a philosopher born as a Christian.” Strauss writes that “much changes in detail, but little in the main issue,” when the reader substitutes the term “Judaism” for the term “Christianity” throughout Strauss's text. “The benevolent reader is asked to read in this fashion in the interest of the issue, and hence in his own interest” (Strauss 1997, 607).

The issue of interest is the truth claim of the necessity of revealed wisdom as the greatest challenge presented to political philosophy. Strauss asks the benevolent reader to be benevolent to himself, not to the author Strauss, so the reader may not miss out on what he can learn. Chen not only does not do himself (or his readers) this favor, he even quotes the author who reminds us how to approach the theologico-political problem as his authority for paying no attention to this problem at all. The fundamental

question is not which of the three revelations is the true one or which Christian political theology does most justice to all aspects and contradictions of the Bible, but whether man as man is right or wrong in basing his life on anything but his own reason. Strauss puts the answer this way, in direct opposition to Schmitt: “man cannot abandon the question of the good society, and [...] he cannot free himself from the responsibility for answering it by deferring to *History* or to *any other power different from his own reason*” (Strauss 1959, 27; my italics).

So why, of all political theologians, Carl Schmitt? What is the benefit of reading and studying him? What is his lesson? Is not his interpretation of how a Christian has to understand the right way of life as a life of historical action just one among many possible interpretations of Christian revelation? Why is his theorizing out of obedience, why is his political theology so worthy of interest to anyone who wants to understand the challenge and the problem of political theology? Schmitt does not allow for the interpretation of political theology as a mere means to the end of the best political order, with the political order understood as essentially a human order designed to bring about the welfare and security of human beings. Schmitt does not allow for the philosophic interpretation of the prophets as lawgivers who “honor the gods with their own wisdom” (Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social*, II, 7), he does not allow for the instrumental meaning of political theology as Varro and Scaevola understood it, because he himself believes in the truth of God’s wisdom, which in turn leads him, like few other believers, to think about and elaborate on what that means for his own life in its every aspect.

There seems to be widespread objection today to the idea that the truth of revelation can ultimately only be met by obedience, i.e. that a “fideist” interpretation of revelation is the only one that lives up to the demands of revelation. The more accepted interpretation, of Christian revelation at least, is that the leap of faith is not in opposition to reason. Schmitt believes in the supra-rationality of the Bible, in revelation being neither accessible nor assailable by human reason. His political theology differs from the political theology of the current pope, Benedict XVI, in that Schmitt does not consider a “synthesis” between Greek philosophy and Christian obedience to be possible, but instead sides with Tertullian against all philosophy. Yet he clearly had an interest in understanding himself, he felt a need to justify his actions. His political theory with its concepts of the enemy, the katechon, the Christian Epimetheus show how seriously he took his task of understanding



his activity. Carl Schmitt can remind both the believer as well as the non-believer that any form of harmonization is the result of a lack of understanding of what is at stake.

Chen again misses the point when he blames Meier for “whitewashing” Schmitt of his political sins by interpreting his political choices as deriving from his faith. To consider Meier’s analysis an absolution of Schmitt presupposes moral categories not inherent in Meier’s approach, which is geared at understanding the problem presented by Schmitt’s political theology—both to the philosopher as well as to Schmitt himself. It aims at an understanding that finds its ultimate interest and intention not in moral judgment—and thereby may be all the more powerful. To investigate the insurmountable problems of a political theory that wants to be based on faith in revelation by showing the disastrous calamities that a political theologian of the intellectual caliber and radical consequence of Schmitt *must* encounter is what philosophy must do in order to “know what it is not, what it cannot be, and what it does not want to be” (Meier 1998, 173). Schmitt, against his will and proclaimed intention of being an enemy to whoever does not believe in revelation, in the last resort cannot avoid his fate of being an involuntary helping hand on the path of a philosophic nature’s quest for knowledge of the right way of life.

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## What Is a Fascist? Goldberg and Xenos on Fascism and Leo Strauss

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Jonah Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left, from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning*. New York: Doubleday, 2007, 487 pp., \$27.95.

Nicholas Xenos, *Cloaked in Virtue: Unveiling Leo Strauss and the Rhetoric of American Foreign Policy*. New York: Routledge, 2008, 168 pp., \$34.95 (paper).

All rational liberal philosophic positions have lost their significance and power [in light of Heidegger's thinking]. One may deplore this, but I for one cannot bring myself to clinging to philosophic positions which have been shown to be inadequate. I am afraid that we shall have to make a very great effort in order to find a solid basis for rational liberalism. Only a great thinker could help us in our intellectual plight. But here is the great trouble: the only great thinker in our time is Heidegger.

Leo Strauss (1988, 29)

These two books at first glance seem to have very little in common, the one written by a reliable conservative associated with *National Review*, and the other written by a reliably leftist professor.

But reading them one after the other reveals some unlikely parallels. For example, both make use of the same rhetorical device of explicitly and briefly denying what is being claimed throughout the book. Professor Xenos, for example, asserts that the "policies of the Bush administration have

not been the product of a Straussian conspiracy” (xi), but this denial is denied by Xenos who cites the conspiracy as the rationale for writing his book in the first place. Goldberg says, “I am not saying that all liberals are fascists” (8), yet this is exactly what he implies in every chapter.

Both books are fundamentally political and moral critiques whose basis remains largely hidden from view. Goldberg suggests that the basic binary is Locke and Rousseau, with the former representing the classical liberalism he approves of, and the latter, the fascism he does not. Xenos is more circumspect, but he clearly favors a form of modern liberalism—“equality and social justice” (xi)—over the fascism he sees in Strauss and presumably the Bush administration. Neither develops or defends his preferred position, and it would not be fair to expect that they would, but it is fair to point out that their criticisms are not moored to anything outside of their own political commitments.

Alasdair MacIntyre, in *After Virtue*, at least gave us a choice between an ancient thinker, Aristotle, and a modern, Nietzsche, but the choices Goldberg and Xenos give us are between two aspects of modern thought, Locke and Rousseau or Carl Schmitt and Karl Marx or some such grouping. That is to say, both authors remain within the horizon of modern thought and both seem to accept the view that one can make a simple choice between two options. The only basis for this choice seems to be one’s inclinations or character: if you prefer limited government and individual freedom then go with Locke; but if you crave dependence on an all-encompassing nanny-state, then Rousseau’s your man. But what if, after careful consideration of the arguments of both thinkers, we come to the conclusion that Rousseau makes the stronger case? Or what if we find Schmitt’s critique of liberalism far more trenchant and persuasive than other critiques or even the best efforts made by the defenders of liberalism?

Both are polemics, Goldberg’s in the pure sense, and Xenos’s in a hybrid sense. Though Xenos describes what he is doing as polemic, he is too much a scholar, and too little a polemicist, for that to be an entirely apt description. For he brings to bear on his chosen task a finely honed intellect as would befit a distinguished professor, and he deploys a full array of scholarly tools and techniques. Sadly, this is all in the service of a myth, the myth of Straussian influence, which renders the sharp dull, and whatever the tools reveal or construct largely beside the point.

Goldberg, though widely read in secondary source materials, is not as skilled in the scholar's craft as Xenos. An experienced culture warrior, his is a recitation of mostly factual information reconfigured into a sometimes effective counter-narrative to the usual account of fascism. For Goldberg, fascism ought to be thought of as a political movement of the left as much as, and really more than, of the right. Up to a point, he is persuasive, then he goes well beyond that point. His tome, as a piece of ordnance in the culture wars, does have impact, but the real, and perhaps unintended outcome, is to render "fascist" as a favored epithet hurled by the left against the right utterly meaningless.

Of the two, it is Goldberg who questions prevailing orthodoxy while Xenos presents himself as a latter-day Meletus defending the pieties of the city against those who do not unquestioningly accept them. His indictment of Strauss amounts to saying that Strauss did not believe in the gods of modern liberalism, Equality and Social Justice, and that he corrupted the youth. Xenos seems willing to tolerate such corruption as long it remains in the classroom, but some of those corrupted youth made their way into government service and apparently influenced U.S. foreign policy. This is what compelled Xenos to write his book.

It is generally thought that Leo Strauss, after becoming a U.S. citizen, voted twice for Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic candidate for president, over General Eisenhower, the Republican candidate. Goldberg might well see this as indicative of certain fascistic tendencies on Strauss's part. Xenos, by contrast, could well see it as either an aberration or perhaps as a sinister way for Strauss to cloak himself in the conventional democratic expectations of his adopted country so as to conceal all the better his true fascistic inclinations. So, how do we recognize the true fascist?

THE GOLDBERG VARIATION:  
WE'RE ALL FASCISTS NOW!

Goldberg's challenge is to argue, contrary to conventional opinion, that fascism ought to be thought of as a political movement of the left instead of the right. To do this requires a drastic modification, if not a wholesale abandonment, of the usual left-right schema that ordinarily guides us when discussing and even thinking about political matters. Such a schema is indispensable since it gives us a common set of reference points within which we can orient ourselves and on the basis of which we can converse with others and make judgments about political matters. Yet, as is fairly well

known, the more we scrutinize the conventional schema, the more we see its limitations, particularly as we move away from the center to the extremes.

We tend to think of anarchism, for example, along with communism as movements of the left, but anarchism arguably has more in common with libertarianism, which we tend to think of as on the political right. Goldberg, though he never makes the point explicitly, appears to be trying to reorient the conventional schema from an ill-defined libertarian perspective, so that on one end, the end he favors, is a greater emphasis on individual freedom, and on the other, the one he opposes, is a greater emphasis on state power. From that standpoint fascism and communism look like different variations of the same theme, almost as if they were mirror images of each other with the left reflected on the right and the right on the left.

Though he does draw parallels in passing between Mussolini and Hitler, on the one hand, and Lenin and Stalin, on the other, this is only secondary to a larger and more provocative claim. Goldberg argues that the American Progressive movement was in many respects a fascist movement, and therefore modern liberalism to the extent it is still progressive is “a descendent and manifestation of fascism” (2) and a “totalitarian political religion” (14). Mussolini, who coined the term “fascism,” is generally thought to be the first fascist leader, but Goldberg claims that “Woodrow Wilson was the twentieth century’s first fascist dictator” (80). This is a startling claim in the service of a startling argument, and it immediately raises the question whether there might be some conceptual or linguistic chicanery at work.

Goldberg’s tacit alteration to the schema in essence amounts to throwing a tarp over the forms and then crawling under it, not so much to shift them around but to superimpose one upon the other, creating a super form, the fascism form, while leaving what little remains as an ill-defined conservative or classical liberal or libertarian form. He is about erasing distinctions and simplification, not clarification and complexity. This creates the space for his polemic with its shocking claims, but at a high cost. The problem is perfectly captured in the final chapter with the phrase, “we’re all fascists now.” Fascism comes to encompass so much that it no longer distinguishes much of anything. This is the basic conceptual distortion of Goldberg’s otherwise engaging narrative.

In his Introduction, Goldberg reviews the inconclusive efforts by scholars to devise an adequate and workable definition of “fascism,” before offering his own fairly lengthy quasi-definition which begins:



“Fascism is a religion of the state.” The rest is fairly conventional, stressing a national leader at the head of a body politic understood as an organic unity, and a totalitarian political program that seeks to align all aspects of life with the aims of the state (23). As Goldberg’s narrative progresses he occasionally makes further definitional comments: “Historically, fascism is the product of democracy gone mad” (81); or “Fascism is the cult of unity, within all spheres and between all spheres” (297); or “Fascism was a human response to a rapidly unfolding series of technological, theological, and social revolutions” (380); or “‘classic’ fascism is first and foremost the elevation of martial values and the militarization of government and society under the banner of nationalism” (119). The latter is from a discussion of Wilson’s “war socialism,” and elsewhere Goldberg applies these sentiments to Teddy Roosevelt, who he says represents the more paternal side of progressive fascism while Wilson is the more maternal side (90).

Goldberg’s claim that fascism is a religion of the state is potentially insightful, but it remains largely superficial, both vague and question-begging. In the case of “classic” fascism, I think Goldberg thinks, the state was thought of as an object of veneration and the source of earthly salvation for a unified populace. It was a “god-state” that came into existence as a secular substitute for traditional forms of religious faith that had steadily lost their hold on the hearts and minds of the masses. He sees something similar at work in American Progressivism, which he claims “was a kind of Christian fascism” or perhaps “Christian socialism” (15). To his credit, he notes the same dynamic at work today on the right in the form of “compassionate conservatism” (401-2). But, in terms of religiosity, there may be some important differences between these two cases, “classic” fascism and what Goldberg calls “friendly fascism.” In the case of the god-state, the distinction between divinity and state is entirely erased, making salvation purely a worldly matter. For some religious Progressives, the state, to be sure, was seen as a vehicle for Christian charity writ large, but the basic distinction between God and state was never lost sight of, and one’s salvation was finally not of this earth. Progressive liberalism and even compassionate conservatism are not efforts to see in the state an ersatz divinity replacing a lost faith, but are efforts to find in the state a means to direct an excess of religious fervor. Goldberg’s definition is vague enough to allow him to claim an essential continuity between “classic” and friendly fascism, but only by occluding some basic differences.

The book is divided into two sections, which overlap both in terms of narrative structure and content. The first section (chapters 1-6 and 9) begins with a brief review of the intellectual currents that lead up to fascism, followed by a roughly chronological account that traces the fascist bacillus as it evolves into different strains from Mussolini to Hitler to the Progressives and Woodrow Wilson to FDR's New Deal, Johnson's Great Society and the '60s counterculture, culminating in Hillary Clinton's Village and the politics of meaning. The second section (chapters 7, 8 and 10) moves thematically through a series of contentious social, cultural and economic issues and movements, abortion, race, sex, environmentalism, Hollywood movies, and the like. Goldberg's basic technique is a form of eristic which attempts to draw parallels between modern liberal positions on these issues and elements of the "classic" fascism of Mussolini and especially Hitler. There is, then, a bit of the *reductio ad Hitlerum* at work in many of his discussions, most of which also include a disclaimer in which Goldberg denies he is doing what he is doing.

Though Goldberg occasionally references sociological explanations, fundamentally he sees the rise of fascism as the coalescing of somewhat disparate intellectual movements like Darwinism, Pragmatism and futurism within the context of a philosophical tradition that stretches back to Rousseau. Goldberg claims that Rousseau's thinking was given practical expression by Robespierre and the French Revolution, which dissolved the "unalienable rights of man" into the "general will." There are passing condemnations of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Sorel, Schmitt, Heidegger and others for having created the intellectual rationale for the fascist Leviathan. In the American context, pragmatists James and Dewey are cited, but Herbert Croly receives the most attention. Croly's formula, "Jeffersonian ends via Hamiltonian means," when combined with the Christian messianism that fed into the Progressive movement, gave American fascism, according to Goldberg, its distinctive look.

Those who are familiar with the works of Rousseau, or any of these thinkers, may well find Goldberg's account an oversimplified caricature. But, as Goldberg says, his "is not an academic book" (23), and by that standard, though his views on these thinkers are somewhat tendentious, they are not implausible. Goldberg sees modern political thought moving on two tracks, the fascist Rousseau track, and the Enlightenment Locke track of Adam Smith, Burke and Montesquieu. Conservatism, rightly understood, takes its inspiration from the latter "with the notable and complicated

exceptions of Leo Strauss and Allan Bloom,” who apparently count Nietzsche and Heidegger as important influences (175). What if, instead of two tracks, there is only one track, so that Locke and company are also implicated in the same movement of thought that reaches its endpoint with Nietzsche and Heidegger and gains political expression in totalitarian tyranny? What if nihilism is built into modern political thought from its inception with Machiavelli and Hobbes? What if a return to Enlightenment thinking in the postmodern world is simply not credible? We might still concede that fidelity to the Enlightenment principles of classical liberalism, to the extent that is still possible, is to be preferred over the available alternatives, but this is merely an act of faith against a sea of troubles.

Goldberg’s strongest chapters are the first two on Mussolini and Hitler. These establish the radical leftist dimensions of Fascism and Nazism, and are less tainted by the tendency to overreach that escalates as the book moves forward. Today we tend to see Mussolini through a Nazi lens, which is to say with death camps and the Holocaust in mind. That is not at all how Mussolini appeared from the 1920s through at least the mid-1930s. Goldberg has great fun digging up quotes from prominent public figures and intellectuals praising Mussolini: Wallace Stevens (26-27), Will Rogers (27) and Charles Beard (100, 103), for example, were among his American admirers, while Churchill, Freud, and Toscanini (27-28) counted among his European fans. There were glowing accounts of Fascist Italy and Mussolini in numerous publications, including *McCall’s*, the *New York Times*, and, not surprisingly, Herbert Croly’s *New Republic*. He was seen as a leader who had created a “Third Way” that transcended the partisan divide between right and left. A longtime communist who split with the party over World War I and Italian nationalism, he was now seen as a pragmatist who “just wanted to get things done” (50).

The infatuation with Mussolini only began to fade with his invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Goldberg rightly notes, contrary to how we typically view the matter today, that Italian Fascism and German National Socialism initially seemed like distinct movements. Jew-hatred, a central and defining element of Nazi ideology, was completely absent from Mussolini’s Fascism. Jews served in Mussolini’s cabinet, and Italy in the early and mid-’30s was seen as a place of refuge for German Jews. For Goldberg’s purposes, however, both reflected a heady mix of leftwing historicism, Marxism as mythologized by Sorel, and rightwing historicism, Nietzsche’s “will to power.” Each combined what seemed best about the right, its emphasis

on nationalism and patriotism, with what seemed best about the left, its emphasis socialism and social welfare. The state, under these circumstances, became a total and totalizing entity with quasi-religious trappings. It is from this reasonably firm foundation that Goldberg begins drawing increasingly tenuous parallels with American Progressives and modern liberals.

Goldberg amasses an impressive amount of factual information to support his argument, and the book is well worth reading for the sophisticated, if not sophistical, way he weaves his account together. But this factual information is in the service of a reconceptualization of our political schema that understands “fascism” as encompassing so much that it ends up meaning very little. It is further compromised by some definitional ambiguities and a latticework of strained parallels between the classic “fascism” of Mussolini and Hitler, and the friendly “fascism” of modern liberalism. Goldberg’s commitment to some form of classical liberalism, the only alternative to “fascism” he allows, is the largely unseen force animating Goldberg’s polemic. Perhaps in his next book he will give us what we most need, a reasoned defense of rational liberalism.

The impression left by Goldberg’s book is that if we want to find the real fascist, all each of us need do is look in the mirror, since we are all fascists now. That, of course, is not very helpful. At a minimum, Goldberg reminds us that “fascist” is best rendered in quotation marks or at least understood as such until its meaning is clarified. Otherwise, it is only an epithet traditionally used by the left against the right that has a purely emotive force: “I disagree with you—you’re evil.” Goldberg’s achievement is to make a plausible case that the right can equally use it against the left, thus undermining its unidirectional force and making its meaninglessness bipolar.

XENOS, MOVEMENT 1:  
THE MYTH OF STRAUSSIAN INFLUENCE

Xenos has a serious problem right from the start, a problem that earlier, less talented critics had tried unsuccessfully to negotiate. He’s sure that Strauss must have said the things Xenos thinks he said, but nowhere in Strauss’s published works does Strauss actually say these things. The challenge, then, is to find a way to “interpret” Strauss’s words so they mean what Xenos wants them to mean. In making his case he can bring before the jury one piece of evidence that earlier critics did not have—a personal letter

Strauss wrote to Karl Löwith in May of 1933. This is the only place where Strauss seems to say something akin to what critics say he said.

The book has essentially two movements: Xenos first gives us his version of the myth of Straussian influence (Preface, Introduction, and chapter 1), followed by a series of close readings of some of Strauss's books and essays (chapters 2-6). These close readings are meant to support the myth, thus turning opinion about Strauss's influence into knowledge. These two movements are connected by Strauss's May 1933 letter, which for Xenos is the master key for unlocking Strauss's meaning. Xenos actually spends very little time analyzing the letter (Introduction and *passim*), despite the fact that it "stands as the document at the beginning, center, and conclusion of my interpretation" (xvii).

One would expect a concluding chapter that pulls the threads of his close readings together into a unified indictment against Strauss. But there is no final argument to the jury. The book limps to a close with a discussion of Francis Fukuyama, whom Xenos rightly characterizes as claiming that liberal democracy is "the only long-term political option in the world after the collapse of the Soviet empire" (143). This is a strange conclusion, since Fukuyama had been presented as a student of Strauss, and Strauss had been labeled "an extreme right-wing antimodernist" (xvi) who harbored "deep-seated anti-Enlightenment sentiments" (141). Xenos tries to square the circle by pointing out reservations Fukuyama expressed about the tension in liberal democracy between the values that sustain it and the economic forces that undermine those values. Fukuyama, it seems, is not sufficiently pious in his acclamations for liberal democracy, and therefore his political views are suspect. It seems illiberal to criticize someone who expresses reservations about liberalism, yet this is what Xenos does here and elsewhere.

The book begins with a telling anecdote, as student Xenos recalls his first encounter with a Straussian professor. Xenos had enrolled in a course on Machiavelli, hoping "to discuss the meaning of Machiavelli for present-day radical politics" (ix), but was disappointed when the professor focused instead on the structure of *The Prince* and how that helps to reveal its meaning. One would expect that if this Straussian professor had extolled the virtues of imperialism, authoritarianism and fascism, Xenos would have remembered it, but he claims he quickly forgot about the course. The anecdote and the book itself do reveal an essential continuity from student Xenos to professor Xenos: he reads thinkers and texts in light of a pre-existing political orientation and judges them accordingly.

This anecdote sets the tone for the rest of the first movement. Xenos is not shy in expressing the usual prejudice against those who claim inspiration from the work of Leo Strauss: they are a “cult” and, especially after 9-11, a dangerous cult that has infiltrated the highest reaches of government. Xenos never quite says what a “Straussian” is, but he somehow knows one when he sees one. They are apparently all men (Eve Adler? Miriam Galston? Mary Nichols? etc.) whose research focuses on only a narrow range of texts and thinkers (Virgil? Alfarabi? Woody Allen? etc.). They all mindlessly adhere to the same catechism concerning the importance of philosophy, and the wisdom of having the wise advise gentlemen on how best to rule the less wise (ix-x). One would think Xenos would at least take the time to actually argue against the caricature he sets up, but all he can do is accuse these unnamed Straussians of “self-satisfied arrogance” (x).

Xenos is clearly sensitive to the X-Files version of the myth of Straussian influence, in which a cabal of aliens has taken over our government to pursue its own imperial designs. He tries to dismiss the obvious anti-Semitic overtones of such a view by noting that most people don’t know the derivation of the word “cabal,” and most mainstream media accounts do not use the term (5-6). No doubt there is someone who can introduce Professor Xenos to the Internet. A search of “Leo Strauss” and “cabal” using Google or Technorati or any search engine will find numerous examples.

Xenos tries to walk the Straussian influence claim back a few paces so as to give it a softer focus. Initially it looks as if the influence merely amounted to the use of two words, “regime” and “tyranny,” and the use of moral language like the word “evil.” (xi). One would think Xenos would try to show a Straussian link to President Bush via his speechwriters, especially his chief speechwriter at the time, Michael Gerson, but alas there is no link. The best-known use of “evil” was in the phrase “axis of evil” coined by David Frum, a colleague of Jonah Goldberg at *National Review*, who is not a Straussian. It’s also hard to see how the case for war against Iraq would have been altered if President Bush and his speechwriters had used the Roman-derived “dictatorship” instead of the Greek-derived “tyranny.” Would that have really made a difference?

Xenos must sense that his claim of Straussian influence on presidential rhetoric, and the power of a few words to lead the country to war, is extremely weak and implausible, so he tries to sharpen the edges by rehearsing some bits from the X-Files version. He does this by citing unnamed journalists and using passive constructions: “It was suggested that

the decision to go to war in Iraq, as well as the questionable public rationale devised to support that decision, were rooted in the conservative political theory of the German-born University of Chicago professor.” Further, “murmurs about ‘noble lies’ and ‘esoteric knowledge’ were heard,” and “the word ‘cult’ started to pop up” (xiii). Though Xenos rightly refers to such nonsense as “conspiracy theories,” this does not prevent him from repeating it.

So how did Strauss’s teachings reach the Oval Office? It turns out they were carried there by acolytes and epigones who were somehow able to make the weaker argument appear to be stronger and thus convince weak-willed superiors to pursue an imperial project that they otherwise would not have. Like lesser critics before him, Xenos faces another difficult hurdle. No one in President Bush’s inner circle at the time the decision was made to go to war against Iraq can reasonably be called a “Straussian.” Not Donald Rumsfeld. Not Colin Powell. Not Condoleezza Rice. Not Dick Cheney. Not Michael Gerson. Not George Tenet. Not Karl Rove. Not John Ashcroft. Xenos trots out the usual suspects, Bill Kristol, Abram Schulsky and Paul Wolfowitz. But Kristol was just a pundit and not a member of the administration. Abram Schulsky was hired in a temporary capacity for the very limited purpose of second-guessing CIA intelligence regarding Iraq. We now know, of course, that his efforts merely reproduced the same defective intelligence that the CIA had developed on its own.

Paul Wolfowitz, as a Deputy Secretary of Defense answering to Donald Rumsfeld, was the highest-ranking member of the administration with any link to Leo Strauss. Xenos tends to stress his connection to Strauss via Allan Bloom, as documented for posterity in the novel *Ravelstein*. There is no need to introduce an intermediary. Wolfowitz actually took two seminars with Leo Strauss at Chicago, one on Montesquieu and one on Plato’s *Laws*, so he would have learned the fascist, authoritarian, imperialist teaching directly from the master. Xenos claims that within days of 9-11 Wolfowitz “was whispering in the ear of George W. Bush that there was a chance Iraq had something to do with the attack.” Xenos cites unnamed newspapers and magazines that “were identifying Wolfowitz as the front man for a group of Straussians that had steadily bored their way into position to influence, or actually make, American foreign policy” (x). It would be useful to know who belongs to this group, but it is a standard feature of the myth that we never get their names. The likely reason is that there was no group or cabal or cult secretly manipulating Rumsfeld, Powell, Rice, Tenet, etc.

More troubling for Xenos is the possibility that Wolfowitz, despite contacts with Bloom and Strauss, is not, in any meaningful sense, a Straussian. In academia Xenos could spot the Straussians by their gender and research topics, and it's fair to say that Wolfowitz is male, but that doesn't narrow the field much. What of his research? Did Wolfowitz write his dissertation on Hobbes or Nietzsche or the joys of imperialism? No, he wrote on the use of nuclear power to desalt water. Wolfowitz, in his academic work and interests, was much closer to Albert Wohlstetter, a foreign policy and nuclear weapons expert, than he was to Leo Strauss. In the end, Prosecutor Xenos can only produce one person who is on the outer edge of President Bush's inner circle, and it's not at all clear that he is even a Straussian.

Xenos is too smart to buy into the X-Files conspiracy theory version of the myth of Straussian influence, and this is clear by his careful use of passive constructions to convey the myth while at the same time holding it at arm's length. He also must know that his assertion about the influence of Straussian rhetoric is too weak to be taken seriously. It seems he is not above invoking the myth in an effort to sway the jury, not by appeals to reason and evidence, but rather to fears and biases. The source of the myth, like the source of all myths, remains something of a mystery, but power envy and fear of difference on the political left likely play some role in the curious hold it still has over otherwise intelligent people. Xenos knows better. It seems fair to conclude that for him the myth must serve an instrumental political purpose, a way to advance "present day radical politics."

The main claim of Xenos's book, then, that the fascist, imperial, authoritarian teaching of Leo Strauss influenced and perhaps determined Bush administration foreign policy, fails, since Xenos has not made a convincing case that this teaching ever had any significant influence on the Bush administration. Not even Xenos himself believes it.

#### XENOS, MOVEMENT 2: PORTRAIT OF A FASCIST?

In the second movement of his book, Xenos cross-examines several of Strauss's writings in an effort to expose the supposed fascist teaching that supposedly influenced the Bush administration. These writings include, most notably, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* and its autobiographical "Preface," "Notes on Carl Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political*," *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes*, "How to Study Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*" (in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*), *On Tyranny*, and *Natural*



*Right and History*. Other writings are mentioned in passing, but these, and the May 1933 letter to Löwith, are clearly the most important for Xenos.

Xenos's interrogation of these works is quite skillful and at times he even approaches a Straussian-like precision, as when analyzing the meanings of particular words or phrases, or when comparing different texts on the same thinker looking for a change in emphasis, or when doggedly pursuing a quote to find its context, and so on. There are even times when scholar Xenos almost seems to get the upper hand over polemicist Xenos, but in the end, these readings are warped by the political purpose that animates Xenos from the start. It should be said, however, that Xenos has made a serious effort to read Strauss with some real precision, making his book far superior to the efforts of other critics, especially Strauss's best-known critic, Shadia Drury. Those who are sympathetically disposed toward Strauss will no doubt find much to disagree with in these chapters, but, political posturing aside, they do contain the basis for a reasoned dialogue about the meaning of Strauss's work and his development as a thinker.

The complex readings that Xenos undertakes are difficult to summarize, but as this juror considers them in retrospect, two issues emerge. On the one hand, Xenos paints a picture of Strauss that runs the gamut from Hobbesian existentialist to Nietzschean nihilist. That is to say, as a thinker committed to modernity, and to the most radical form of modernity, nihilism—or perhaps today we would say, postmodernity. Yet, on the other hand, he wants to insist that Strauss looked to premodern or pre-Enlightenment thought, such as natural law teaching, that understood human nature as evil and in need of dominion by a higher authority. These two portraits, though they do reflect a tension in Strauss's work, do not rest easily together. If we take Strauss seriously as a nihilist, then it's not clear on what basis human nature can be said to be "evil" or on what basis a natural law teaching even makes sense. But if Strauss really is committed to a natural law teaching and the proposition that human nature is evil, then he can't be a nihilist. The Xenos portrait then gives us a sharply bifurcated Strauss, a premodern moral absolutist and a postmodern nihilist, but no effort is made to explain how Strauss held the two together.

Xenos never really gives much of an account of the premodern teaching that he attributes to Strauss. Such an account would necessarily involve a discussion of Strauss's reading of Plato. Though there are some passing references to Plato (e.g., 21)—not enough to warrant a mention in the index—Xenos makes no sustained effort to develop this critical side of

Strauss's thinking. In his February 2, 1933 letter to Löwith, the letter immediately prior to the May 19, 1933 letter that Xenos considers so important, Strauss already indicates his turn toward Plato. This emerges out of comments about the "aporia" of Nietzsche: "When I became acquainted with Plato's Laws, it became clear to me ... that if one remembers certain Platonic teachings, Nietzsche's questions, which are also our questions, are put very simply, clearly, originally. Certain observations regarding Medieval philosophy were added for confirmation so that I *finally* considered an *attempt* advisable. The abstract historicist doubts are well-known to me—but I believe that they present themselves in the end differently than in the beginning. Long speech, short sense: I must try whether I 'succeed.' If I make my corrections on Nietzsche through my Hobbes interpretation obvious to you, my 'Platonism' will perhaps not appear as 'romantic' as now."

Strauss came to the view that modern philosophy had reached an impasse with Nietzsche and Heidegger from which it could not extricate itself. This impasse was reflected in the devolution of liberalism into modern forms of totalitarian tyranny. When Xenos says, "my contention is that Strauss's target is modernity itself" (xviii), he suggests that Strauss ought to have targeted something else, or perhaps used his intellect to make the case for liberal modernity. But this is to insist that Strauss be intellectually dishonest. Strauss after much reading and reflection concluded that modern liberalism was simply not philosophically tenable, so he looked for a horizon outside of the modern problematic and explored the possibility that the thought of the ancients, particularly Plato, opened up new ways of thinking about these issues. This is very much the subtext of the Strauss-Löwith letters at this time, with Löwith committed to the impasse of modern thought, and honestly so, while Strauss is looking for the possibility of an alternative in the ancients.

Xenos says quite reasonably that esoteric communication is a feature only of public communication and would not therefore be necessary in a discussion "between friends," as in the correspondence between Strauss and Löwith (15). Xenos assumes then that the meaning of private communication must be transparent and direct with no need for interpretation. This is why Xenos does not apply his scholar's skills to the May 19, 1933 letter. He simply quotes from it, especially this passage: "And, as for the *issue* [Sache]: from this, that a rightward turning Germany does not tolerate us, absolutely nothing follows against the principles of the right. On the contrary, only from the principles of the right, from fascist, authoritarian, *imperial* principles,

may one protest with dignity, without the ridiculous and pitiful appeal to the *droits imprescriptibles de l'homme* [unalienable rights of man], against the dreadful state of affairs [meskine Unwesen].” When this passage is combined with a quote from the *Aeneid* (6.851-853) and a sentence that says, “[t]here is no reason to crawl to crosses, not even the cross of liberalism, so long as somewhere in the world a spark of Roman thought glows,” it seems natural to think that Strauss is praising Mussolini’s Italy without actually mentioning it by name. That may be a correct reading, in which case Strauss would have something in common, as Jonah Goldberg reminds us, with at least some American Progressives. I want to suggest, however, that the meaning of the letter is not nearly as transparent and direct as Xenos claims.

The May 1933 letter is a single and singular link in a much longer series of exchanges between Strauss and Löwith that predates this correspondence. In his February 2, 1933 letter, Strauss confirms this: “Thank you for your letter and your essay on Jaspers. Over Jaspers we have already entertained ourselves many times verbally and in writing.” We flatter ourselves if we think we can listen in on a tiny part of an ongoing conversation between two people we don’t know, facing an unprecedented set of circumstances, and somehow grasp what is being said with perfect clarity. Private conversation may well have its own set of complexities. At a minimum we need to know who these two people are, their characters, inclinations, interests, etc., and we need to get a sense of the interpersonal dynamic at work between them. If we are only going to look at one tiny moment in the conversation, we also need to see what preceded that moment, to the extent possible, and perhaps what the response was. Xenos does give us some biographical information on Strauss, but he says almost nothing about Löwith. He also gives us some key points of historical context—the Nazi accession to power and Hitler’s being named chancellor in January 1933. Heidegger joined the Nazi party on May 1, 1933, and as Xenos says, we have no way of knowing if Strauss knew that when he wrote his letter on May 19. Even if he didn’t know it, it would not have surprised him.

In his February 2 letter, Strauss says: “I do not believe, admittedly, that the battle lines at present are so confused as Jaspers—and you?—assume. I see before me the battle between left and right, and the *interpretations* of this battle on both sides: the progressive and Marxist left, and the Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Dostoyevski right . . . I tried to find, then, a correct conception of one of those battlefronts . . . thus I study the Enlightenment, in particular, Spinoza and Hobbes.” Heidegger is later grouped with Nietzsche,

so Strauss clearly sees him as another figure on the existential right. More than twenty years later Strauss would develop the essential insight expressed in his February 2 letter, in an address given in 1955 under the title “What Is Political Philosophy?”: “It was the contempt for these permanencies which permitted the most radical historicist [Heidegger] in 1933 to submit to, or rather welcome ... the verdict of the least wise and least moderate part of his nation while it was in its least wise and least moderate mood .... The biggest event of 1933 would rather seem to have proved, if such proof was necessary, that man cannot abandon the question of the good society, and he cannot free himself from the responsibility for answering it by deferring to History or to any other power different from his own reason” (Strauss 1989, 27). The next section of the address is called “The Classical Solution,” and it starts with a discussion of Plato’s *Laws*. Do these sound like the words of a fascist, a radical rightwing antimodern who sees human nature as evil and guided fundamentally by fear? Xenos might object that this was a public address, so Strauss would have donned his cloak of virtue in order to conceal his true views. But the views expressed here are merely an elaboration of Strauss’s basic insight expressed in his February letter to Löwith, with the added advantage of knowing for certain that Heidegger had joined the Nazi party.

On the basis of the February letter, then, there appear to be three political orientations: the Enlightenment left (including liberalism and Marxism), the modern existential right (fascism), and the pre-Enlightenment ancients and medievals. Xenos’s portrait of Strauss tends to conflate the latter two, when Strauss clearly does not sympathize with either the modern left or right; and what a pre-Enlightenment political configuration would look like in the modern world remains unclear. Maybe he does have something like ancient Rome in mind and perhaps he sees a spark of Roman thought in Mussolini, but he likely would have recognized Mussolini as a creature of the existential right. Or perhaps he favored a regime that is still connected in some way with premodern monarchical or aristocratic institutions. Xenos finds this prospect “hair-raising,” as if one could make a simple choice in 1933 Germany for liberal democracy. Weimar liberalism, a regime imposed on a conquered Germany by others, was simply not a viable option, and in fact its own democratic processes had permitted the existential right in the form of the Nazi movement to come to power.

This account from Strauss’s February 2 letter does seem to conflict with his May 19 letter. The answer, if there is one, may lie in Löwith’s May 13 letter and the two postcards sent prior to Strauss’s May 19 letter.

Löwith is a few years older than Strauss, and like Strauss, he was a World War I veteran. Löwith had been badly injured—losing a lung—and was taken prisoner. He was sent to Italy to convalesce and his experience there, at least initially, left a favorable impression of Italy and the Italian people. He worked closely with Heidegger, doing both his dissertation and habilitation under his direction. He is best known today for his excellent studies on nineteenth-century philosophy and a penetrating essay on Heidegger's thought and its relation to Nazism. His own political sympathies remain about as inscrutable as Strauss's, but he does seem to have shared the basic conviction that modern thought had reached an impasse with Nietzsche and Heidegger.

At the time the correspondence starts, Löwith, who is on the faculty at Marburg, is clearly unhappy and looking to find another position. Many of his letters review, often in labored detail, his efforts—where he interviewed, who he spoke to, what his chances are, who's for and against him, and so forth. Strauss's letters often begin by mentioning what he did to help Löwith, whom he mentioned his name to, an address for someone who might be able to help, and so forth. Löwith's May 13 letter starts out in the usual fashion, as he goes on about a recent interview in Berlin. He then seems annoyed at Strauss for not telling him that he had married. This then sets the stage for a striking insult: "I myself was somewhat annoyed in turn that you did not have the virtue rightly praised by Hitler of 'manly discretion,' but (except for Klein) you told both Krüger and Gadamer of my plans. That was very unpleasant for me since *I* had so far said nothing to either, so long as the matter [Sache] was completely undecided. If you could present yourself to the Marburg gossips, you would then also probably understand why many things here I do not let become public, and now more than ever." The backhanded comparison between the anti-Semitic Hitler, and Strauss, a German Jew, seems exceptionally sarcastic and cutting. Strauss does not respond in kind, but it might be worth noting that he introduces the most controversial part of his May 19 letter with the same word, "Sache" (matter or issue) that Löwith uses in his insult, almost as if he were responding to it. This may be an instance of Strauss taking, to use Werner Dannhauser's formulation, "unseemly pleasure in taunting Löwith" by way of responding to the insult (Dannhauser 2006, 358).

These tentative reflections are not meant to reach any final conclusion, but rather to simply indicate that Strauss's May 1933 letter deserves close scrutiny. There is, of course, much more that one could say. The use of "Unwesen" to describe the emerging National Socialist regime, which Xenos

translates perfectly reasonably as “a dreadful state of affairs,” also has a technical meaning for Heidegger, denoting a deformation of Being. Löwith’s response in his May 28 letter also uses Heideggerian terms, “faktisch” and “vorhandene,” suggesting at a minimum that they both have Heidegger on the mind and perhaps are even engaged in an exchange about Heidegger below the surface of the text. There is also the mysterious “mesquine,” used to modify “Unwesen,” which appears to be a Germanic spelling of French “mesquin” or Italian “meschino,” meaning “mean” or “petty.” Xenos wisely does not attempt to translate this word, but we are left to wonder what Strauss was trying to convey by using it. Then there are the Christian references that Strauss uses throughout the letter: an altered verse from Hebrews, “non habemus locum manentem, sed quaerimus” (“we do not have a permanent place, but we are looking”); Paul’s “secundum carnem” (“according to the flesh”); the “crawling to crosses” idiom; and his use, at the end of the letter, of “Dixi, et animam meam salvavi” (“I spoke and I saved my soul”). This was a common Latin expression, derived perhaps from Ezekiel (3:18-19) or Augustine, but Löwith would have recognized it immediately as the concluding line of Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Program*, where it was obviously used ironically. How did Strauss intend it? There is also word play with Haken, as in “hook,” and then Hakenkreuz, or hooked cross, i.e., swastika. It would also be useful to consider Löwith’s response: “Christianity has thoroughly corrupted the Roman spirit” and “fascism is absolutely a *democratic* outgrowth.” In his June letter, Löwith asks Strauss, “Did you catch sight of Heidegger’s Rektoratsrede? Very interesting . . .” Strauss does not respond to this question.

We always have to be careful in trying to read between the lines, or in casting troubling statements in an ironical light. In the end, Xenos may turn out to be right, and Strauss at this time really may have been a supporter of Mussolini, thus confirming the testimony of Hans Jonas (Jonas 2003, 161). Of course, we would then need to clarify what precisely that means. Perhaps instead of focusing on what Strauss and Löwith said, we should focus on what they did. Strauss went first to France, home of the “unalienable rights of man,” then to Britain, an imperial democracy that still retained some element of the premodern in its political and social institutions, and then finally to the United States, the nation that rectified the dreadful state of affairs and imposed a liberal democratic regime on the part of Germany it controlled. Löwith finally took what amounted to an extended sabbatical and went to Fascist Italy, where he remained quite happily until Mussolini was forced by Hitler to adopt the German race laws. Löwith then completed his tour of Axis powers by going to Imperial Japan where he remained until 1941, when he

finally “crawled to the cross” of liberalism by coming to the United States. He remained for about 15 years and then returned to Germany.

The second movement of Xenos’s book, then, is at least somewhat compromised. Xenos understands Strauss as he, Xenos, understands himself—as someone whose scholarship follows in the wake of strongly held political and moral commitments. The May 1933 letter is the master key for Xenos precisely because it appears to reveal Strauss’s own commitments, and this then allows Xenos to bend his readings of Strauss’s public writings in that direction. This appearance, as I tried to indicate, may not be as clear and simple as Xenos suggests, and even if we conclude that Strauss sympathized with Italian Fascism, we have to be careful to indicate precisely what that means. Otherwise, calling Strauss a fascist, which is in essence what Xenos is doing, is just a way to move the jury with an emotion-laden epithet.

The Xenos indictment implies that Strauss was a “fascist,” whose “fascist” teachings were taken over wholesale by student epigones who somehow made it into the highest reaches of government service, where they whispered “fascist” policy ideas into the ears of dimwitted policy-makers, who then pursued a “fascist” policy in Iraq by removing a “fascist” dictator. The indictment, when taken as a whole, fails since Xenos has not shown in a convincing way that Straussians or Strauss’s thinking ever had any influence on U.S. foreign policy or even Bush administration rhetoric.

What if we take the charges in the indictment separately and imagine a jury of reasonable men and women, men and women who are not easily moved by scary stories of a nefarious conspiracy involving a secret cult of fascists who have surreptitiously taken over the government? Such a jury would certainly dismiss the first charge, claiming influence on government policy, out of hand. There is just no evidence for it. The second charge, that Leo Strauss may have held illiberal political views, is less clear. Xenos, guided by his own political purposes, is just not a reliable enough prosecutor to earn a vote of guilty, yet there is too much uncertainty for a claim of complete innocence. Maybe the way forward is to try to read and understand Strauss as he tried to read and understand other thinkers, i.e., as they understood themselves. That way we will remain true to Strauss’s own intention instead of seeing his work as fodder for the narrow political battles of the day. Only in that way can we get the true measure of Strauss and reach a final verdict.

It appears, then, that neither Xenos nor Goldberg has given us much guidance in recognizing the true fascist. To conclude somewhat

inconclusively, we really can't say with much certainty that Leo Strauss held fascist sympathies, either behind a cloak of virtue or otherwise, any more than we can say that modern liberals are friendly fascists or that we're all fascists now.

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## Beyond Ancients, Moderns, Heroes, and Villains: Thinking About the Founding with Richard Zinman

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Richard Zinman's essay "Thinking about the Founding" (*Interpretation* 36/2 [Winter 2009], 103-44) provides a thorough, close, perceptive, and challenging reading of *Interpreting the Founding* (Gibson 2006) and *Understanding the Founding* (Gibson 2007). Zinman's serious (to borrow the Straussian term) engagement with my works merits an equally serious response. There are several points where he is simply correct; others where I would modify his insights slightly; and only a few where I substantially disagree. Zinman concentrates his analysis on *Understanding the Founding*, which he considers chapter by chapter. I will follow the same format, concentrating on where I disagree.

### ECONOMICS

The first important claim that is contestable is Zinman's conclusion that, despite my desire to establish its viability, economic interpretation of the Constitution is "on life-support" (106). To his credit, Zinman does not make the claim, which I frequently hear, that Forrest McDonald's *We the People: The Economic Origins of the Constitution* refuted the economic interpretation (McDonald 1958). One of the points of this chapter is that McDonald's interpretation is itself an economic interpretation. Another is that there are now multiple, competing economic interpretations.

Instead of simply dismissing economic analysis, Zinman pursues a more subtle two-part strategy. He first emphasizes and builds upon my repeated suggestions about the significant limitations of economic analysis. He then suggests that economic interpretations after Beard have established only obvious and uncontested points such as the proposition that

members of the Convention were a consolidated economic group of wealthy and educated elites from commercial coastal regions who explicitly rejected the currency finance system practiced within the states. Together, these two lines of argumentation converge as an effort to turn my ambivalent generalizations about the status and limitations of economic interpretation against the endeavor to discover an empirical, material, critical, and possibly class-based (as opposed to an intellectual, democratic, and celebratory) reading of the formation of the Constitution.

Zinman's conclusions here represent more the wishful thinking of an opponent of economic interpretation than an accurate characterization of its status and legacy. First, contrary to Zinman's suggestion, even the basic insight that the members of the Convention were a consolidated economic group from commercial coastal regions who uniformly rejected the currency finance system is hardly uncontroversial or inconsequential. What sensible scholar has denied this proposition? Well, Forrest McDonald for one. McDonald argued that "the delegations [to the Constitutional Convention] constituted an almost complete cross-section of the geographical areas and shades of opinion existing in the United States in 1787" (McDonald 1958, 37). As suggested by the title of his book, McDonald argued that the Constitution was *drafted* as well as ratified by "we the people." Subsequent research has established that the Convention included only delegates from the commercial coastal regions of the nation, no advocates of paper money or supporters of the currency finance system, at best a few ordinary men and modest farmers, and certainly no radicals such as Daniel Shays or his followers. To be sure, the absence of delegates representing the interior of the country and the widest stratum of society (middling farmers) or advancing radical political ideas does not prove that the Constitution was written to promote the interests of an elite class. Elites may sometimes write documents that further common interests. Still, the essentially homogeneous composition of the Constitutional Convention should at minimum heighten our attention to the possibility that elites were defining the interests of the nation through the prism of their own.

More broadly, despite the fall from prominence of Beard's economic interpretation, variations of an economic interpretation—Beardian in spirit, if not strictly adhering to his thesis—have never been without able defenders and have been absorbed into standard narratives of the constitution-making process. E. James Ferguson established the relationship between Robert Morris's elitist economic plan and the nationalist movement of the

early 1780s that eventually culminated in the formation of the Constitution and the enactment of Hamilton's economic program (Ferguson 1961). Jackson Turner Main established the growing number and influence in the states during the 1780s of legislators who were not from the social or economic ranks of the gentlemen Founders and the importance of these legislators to the passage of debtor relief legislation. More generally, he established the strong support for the Constitution in the urban and commercial regions of the nation and the strength of opposition to it in western and frontier regions. This geographic interpretation, Main argued, pointed toward a modified and qualified class interpretation (Main 1966, 1973, 1974).

These points have recently been expanded upon by Woody Holton, who has forcefully argued that, while almost everyone agreed that there was an economic crisis during the 1780s, many now forgotten Americans set forth a plausible case that *more* debtor relief was the proper solution to the financial crisis and that states had been too fiscally conservative. Holton has also drawn a strong correlation between support for elections from large legislative districts and opposition to debtor and tax relief in the states. This correlation suggests that the Federalists' goals of using large electoral districts to secure the election of gentlemen-statesmen had concrete policy goals which were related to class and social status (Holton 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2007). Recent works by Robert McGuire and a cadre of rational-choice theorists have reestablished the significance at both the Constitutional Convention and the state ratifying conventions of the geographic area that the delegates represented, their private and public security holdings, and whether or not they held slaves or represented slaveholding areas to their support for or opposition to the Constitution (Gibson 2007, nn. 85 and 88, 202-3; Heckelman and Dougherty 2007).

At this point, Zinman would doubtlessly hasten to observe that my own conclusions are that none of this scholarship "proves" the boldest claim of the Beardian variation of the economic interpretation, namely that a class struggle accompanied ratification. But that claim, which has support in the studies above, has also not been refuted either, certainly not by McDonald. Instead of a single "truncated" economic interpretation (107), we now have competing economic interpretations that support fundamentally different narratives about the constitution-making process. One suggests a class-based economic interpretation, the other a democratic-pluralist one. The scholarship of McGuire and Holton supports some of the broad claims first made by E. James Ferguson and Jackson Turner Main and points back

to a class-based economic interpretation. The establishment by many scholars of substantial support for the Constitution by ordinary merchants and tradesmen in commercial coastal regions, the large number of middling farmers who supported the Constitution in some states, and the support that the Constitution gained among almost all interests almost immediately after its ratification suggest the multiplicity and complexity of the ratifiers' motives and interests and point to a more pluralistic account. At this point, it remains for scholars with a tactile knowledge of the structure of eighteenth-century America to uncover new evidence about the economic holdings of the ratifiers of the Constitution and for scholars to apply advanced statistical methodologies to test this new evidence or to find novel ways to test old data in order to make a convincing case for one of these versions of the economic interpretation. Whether such studies take place or not, however, Founding scholarship would not be advanced by dismissing economic interpretation or the powerful narrative about the formation of the Constitution that it has generated.

#### DEMOCRACY

Zinman's animus against the Progressives continues in his discussion of my treatment of the perennial question, "How democratic was the Constitution?" In the course of providing a lengthy and careful summary of this chapter, Zinman suggests that I should have provided a more extensive comparison of the original Constitution to polis democracy and the British constitution and that I have erred in maintaining that the principal cause of the intractability in this debate is disagreement over definitions of democracy. The most important distinction in this debate, according to Zinman, is between the critical account of democracy set forth by the Federalists and subsequent defenders of the Constitution and the uncritical and naïve celebration of democracy given by Progressive, Neo-Progressive, and New Left critics. We can "sharpen" and advance this debate, Zinman maintains, by adopting the Federalists' belief that democracy has "characteristic flaws" (113). Unlike contemporary critics of the Constitution, "the Federalists' solution rested on a remarkably broad, deep, and candid analysis of the problem of democracy." They understood democracy as a "problem (or cluster of problems)" because it contains flaws that are "rooted in the very nature and essential characteristics of that form" (*ibid.*). Debating the question of whether or not democracy is a problem, Zinman argues, would place the burden back on critics of the Constitution who hold that democ-

racy is unproblematic and that more democracy is the proper solution to the problems of democracy.

First, although a more extensive commentary would doubtlessly be illuminating, I did not give more attention to polis democracy or the British constitution (or for that matter to contemporary parliamentary forms of democracy) because none of these was really on the table in 1787. Representation was introduced early in the colonies and became the only practical means of conducting popular government as the population quickly grew. Moreover, even as the principles of mixed government continued to have a powerful influence in North America and are arguably embodied in some form in the Constitution, the monarchical element in the British constitution insured that they would not be replicated by republican Americans.

Second, Zinman is correct to suggest that Progressives are among the most unqualified supporters of democracy and that they have often simplistically suggested that the cure for the defects of democracy is more democracy. He is also correct that, even with the universal celebration that has been given to democracy—indeed because of that celebration—a mature and satisfying defense of it requires a critical analysis of its tendencies and flaws. Still, Zinman’s suggestion for advancing and sharpening this debate is more likely to polarize it still further. Zinman’s proposal has its roots in Martin Diamond’s famous distinction between wise and foolish partisans of democracy. A proponent of democracy who ignores its defects, Diamond contended, is not a more committed partisan of democracy, but rather a foolish one. The real question, according to Diamond, is thus, “are there natural defects to democracy and, if there are, what are the best remedies?” (Diamond 1959, 56). Although he is too much a gentleman to say it this bluntly, Zinman believes that the Progressives are foolish partisans of democracy and the Federalists wise ones.

Nevertheless, does Zinman really believe that an inquiry into the nature of democracy and a comparison between the defenses of it given by Federalists and Progressives will result in any meaningful agreement or concessions? Or would such questioning take the form of an interrogation with the purpose of exposing the Progressives as foolish defenders of democracy? Such an approach, I would suggest, amounts to telling the Progressives that if they understood the nature of democracy they would understand that the Constitution is democratic. Scholars who find this illuminating are likely to be the ones who already believe it. Conversely, most Progressives have

already concluded that the Federalists' defense of the Constitution is itself highly partisan and self-interested. They are not going to adopt it as a starting point for future debate or concede that the Federalists (or the Straussians) have grasped the "nature" or "essential characteristics" of democracy—even if (as is also unlikely) they were to concede that "democracy" has a nature that can be discovered.

As for Zinman's "dispassionate inquirers" (114), I am still waiting for them to join this debate. In truth, I am no more confident now than when I wrote these books that any strategy is likely to create greater agreement among the participants or that any definition of democracy (including the one that is implicit in my analysis) will be recognized as the starting point for an impartial inquiry. This is why I choose the approach that I articulated and executed in chapter 2 of *Understanding the Founding*. Examining the three central dimensions of democracy (inclusiveness, political equality, and responsiveness) that commentators have had in mind when they characterize the Constitution as democratic or undemocratic does not place the burden of proof on either side. Instead, it challenges commentators to engage each other on the common ground that the debate itself has created and to clarify what qualities they have in mind when they use the term democracy. The question whether or not the Constitution advances those qualities should then become clearer also. Once that question is addressed, then we can then ask whether or not any sacrifice of democratic qualities is justified because it advances other aspects of good government.

My own conclusions from this approach are not simply that the Constitution was more democratic than its critics have suggested and less democratic than its defenders have been willing to admit. More precisely, I concluded that the original Constitution was much more inclusive than is generally perceived, but failed to institutionalize the principle of political equality in important ways because of the federal features contained within the national government. Following the lead of Michael Zuckert, I also concluded that "long-leash" republicanism, which purposefully made the Constitution less responsive to the public will than the governments within the states at this time, was adopted because the Federalists had concluded that other attributes of "good government," including stability, energy, and the protection of rights, could not be secure in a system based on "short-leash" republicanism (Zuckert 2003, 155-63).

Most broadly, contrary to the thrust of Zinman's analysis, opposition to the Constitution as anti-democratic cannot be so easily

dismissed as the product of new-fangled radical Progressivism. At least two traditions of opposition to the Constitution as undemocratic emanate from the Founding. First, ironically, a tradition of criticism of the Constitution as anti-democratic emanates from its principal draftsmen, James Madison and James Wilson. This tradition rests on the proposition that the Constitution violates the principle of political equality because it contains *arbitrary* inequalities (Lee and Oppenheimer 1999; Dahl 2003; Rosenfeld 2004; Levinson 2006). As Madison and Wilson most vocally pointed out, equal representation for all states in the Senate violates fundamental principles of equity. This point can then be projected onto the inclusion of senatorial electoral votes in the Electoral College and the role of the Senate and the states in the amendment process, where the votes of citizens from small states are also given substantially greater weight than the votes of citizens from more populous ones. It is illuminating that Zinman focuses on the discussion of the long-leash republicanism of the Framers, which he finds “more revealing” (110), but does not consider this tradition of criticism or the issue of political equality and the Constitution. Such a consideration will make it more difficult to characterize the Constitution as democratic.

The Anti-Federalists represent a second tradition of criticism of the Constitution within the Founding as anti-democratic. The Anti-Federalists pose a particular problem to Zinman and Straussians generally since opposition to the Federalists and the Constitution is considered inappropriate and unwarranted and the Anti-Federalists opposed the Constitution. Zinman deftly dodges this problem by suggesting that, unlike Progressives, Neo-Progressives, and New Left scholars, the Anti-Federalists can be counted among the wise democrats even though they opposed the Constitution because they accepted the problem of democracy. Zinman, however, asserts rather than establishes this point. I am not aware of any scholar of the Anti-Federalists who has shown their extensive engagement with the problematic character of democracy. Furthermore, many Anti-Federalists were for radically increasing the responsiveness of the national government, especially by increasing the number of representatives in Congress. Thus, even if they accepted “the problem of democracy,” many Anti-Federalists, like the Progressives, nevertheless saw a more responsive political system as the proper solution. Finally, the Anti-Federalists—no less than the Progressives—drummed away at the aristocratic and oligarchic tendencies of the Constitution. All of this suggests that opposition to the Constitution as anti-democratic is a complex and rich tradition—one that has and should continue to inform American political thought and considerations of the character of the Constitution.

## METHOD

In his analysis of chapter 3 of *Understanding the Founding*, Zinman first argues that the methodological precepts of proponents of the republican school are really closer to those of the Progressives than they (or I) want to admit. Both the Progressives on the one hand and proponents of the republican school such as Gordon Wood, Bernard Bailyn, J. G. A. Pocock, and others on the other hand, Zinman contends, “argue that historical agents are manipulators of ideas and that ideas are rationalizations of interests” (115-16). Second, Zinman wants me to come clean, take a more decisive stand in the methodology wars, and to name my friends and enemies. Methodologically at least, he suggests, I am with the Straussians. My criticisms of the linguistic contextualists, he maintains, are drawn from Straussians, but I did not name them. Why not? Furthermore, he wants me to clarify whether or not I believe that errors within Straussian scholarship result from their methodology or the incorrect application of it. Third, and perhaps most broadly, he brings attention to the political implications of the debate between linguistic contextualists (who practice a particular variant of historicism) and philosophical rationalists. By suggesting that we cannot have meaningful dialogue with past political actors or consider the claims to truth of the ideas that they present, the linguistic contextualists suggest that we must do our thinking on our own. Such a position, Zinman and I agree, is loaded with important contemporary *political* implications. Put concisely, it establishes the impossibility of learning directly from the Founders or informing our politics with their ideas.

Zinman’s analysis here is perceptive, provocative, and (in a couple of cases) decisive. Still, I have several points of disagreement. Contrary to what Zinman suggests, Wood and other proponents of republican synthesis are not Progressive wolves in linguistic clothing. One of the most consistent claims advanced in both Wood’s methodological writings and his historical studies is that ideas have an autonomy that operates over the heads of the historical participants, often making them more the victims of ideas than the manipulators of them and “taking them in directions no one could have foreseen” (Wood 1966, 23; 1969). When ideas become public and collectively form ideologies, according to Wood, historical actors are forced to speak and act in their terms. Unlike Progressives, then, the linguistic contextualists sincerely believe that ideas matter for the student of political thought because they are as much a part of the social fabric as the most concrete material interests. For Zinman, this strategy of emphasizing the effect



of ideologies on the contours of discourse and acceptable behavior is a thin reed on which to rest the study of the history of political thought. This is why he objects so strongly to my statement that both the linguistic contextualists and the philosophical rationalists take the study of political thought seriously. Zinman cannot concede that any approach to the study of the history of political thought that does not investigate the claim to truth of ideas really takes political thought seriously.

Although Zinman underestimates the earnestness of the linguistic contextualists' commitment to the study of ideas, I agree that ultimately we must go beyond sympathetic reconstructions of the political thought of historical actors into an investigation of the truth of the claims that they make and that such an approach will unavoidably lead us to take sides. For this reason, if I could write the opening to chapter 4 again, I would emphasize, as Zinman suggests, that what binds the philosophical rationalists and the ideologists is their mutual belief in objective history, but what separates them is a commitment by the former to exploring philosophical truth. As Zinman suggests, my contention that Wood and the linguistic contextualists take ideas seriously betrays my earlier contentions that they challenge the very possibility of the philosophical analysis of political ideas. In taking this position, I was adopting Wood's understanding of what it meant to take political thought seriously. I should have been applying my own, which is similar to Zinman's.

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that even Wood's rejection of a search for the truth of past historical ideas is driven by an admirable goal. Wood resists a stronger analysis of the substance or truth of the political thought of historical actors because he believes that it will prevent historians from being impartial. In Wood's estimation, the historian who adopts either the Patriot or Tory interpretation of the American Revolution or the Federalist or Anti-Federalist interpretation of the Constitution becomes entangled in the debate of the historical participants themselves and acts as a partisan. To remain impartial, historians should "explain the reasons for these contrasting meanings and why each side should have given to the Constitution the meaning it did." For Wood, then, there is truth about history (how it happened and what people believed), but not truth in history. Neither the Federalists nor Anti-Federalists, he argues, were correct. Instead, they sought to explain the world through the prism of ideas present in the society in which they lived. Indeed, Wood has even contended that there is no real meaning to the Constitution, only a meaning to be constructed as the

proponents of various interpretations struggle to turn linguistic conventions in their direction (Wood 1987, 632).

The classic studies of Bailyn, Wood, and other linguistic contextualists make important contributions. Bailyn's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* can still be read with great profit. Unlike the subsequent works of the republican school, it properly characterizes radical Whig political thought and places it in the context of other traditions of political thought. *The Creation of the American Republic* still presents one of the finest analyses in print of the revolutionary state constitutions and the problems that led to the calling of the Constitutional Convention. Wood also provides an excellent sympathetic reconstruction of both Federalist and Anti-Federalist thought. Still, it is unfortunate that Wood and other linguistic contextualists have spurned the possibility of finding truth in history and making judgments about, for example, the real meaning of the Constitution, or whether the Federalists or Anti-Federalists made a stronger case for their understanding of it. Few philosophers or political theorists commit the time and energy necessary to develop the tactile historical knowledge that is the historians' trademark. This contextual knowledge puts historians in a peculiar place not to avoid judgments, but to make sensible and balanced ones.

In Wood's case, the effort to envelope the opposing perspectives or "persuasions" of the Federalists and Anti-Federalists leads not to a single, impartial interpretation, but to two accounts that are—taken singularly—partisan, but considered collectively, confused and irreconcilable. At times in *The Creation of the American Republic*, Wood spurns his own injunction against analyzing the character of the Constitution and suggests with the Anti-Federalists that it was "intrinsically an aristocratic document designed to check the democratic tendencies of the period." He also agrees with the Anti-Federalists that the Federalists were aristocrats who engaged in a "repudiation of 1776." At other times, however, he maintains that the Federalists did not reject the principles of 1776 or "directly reject democratic politics as it had manifested itself in the 1780s," but instead sought to control the excesses of the Revolution. The creation of a new central government that was more powerful than anyone could have expected, he now suggests like a good defender of the Constitution, was "a progressive attempt to salvage the Revolution in the face of its imminent failure" (Wood 1969, 513, 519, 517, 475). Ultimately, these accounts simply cannot be reconciled.

All of this suggests both the importance and limitations to the student of political thought of historical context and sympathetic

reconstruction and points to where the linguistic contextualists falter. Historical context—including linguistic context—is essential not because it teaches us that political thought is always targeted at specific problems generated by a particular political society. In many cases, that proposition is empirically, demonstrably false. Linguistic context is important instead because it reveals what philosophical truth is at stake in the first place. Sympathetic reconstructions of the political thought of historical actors are important for the same reason. Sympathetic reconstructions should precede philosophical analysis in search of truth, but they cannot act as a surrogate for it. Philosophical analysis, to adapt and invert a phrase from Wood, separates reality from rhetoric.

Zinman, I suspect, would not disagree with much of what I have written in the last four paragraphs. Nevertheless, what I did not do in *Understanding the Founding* and will not do here—but what Zinman really seems to want—is to suggest that the debate between philosophical rationalists and linguistic contextualists is simply a debate between Straussians and their opponents. As the numerous quotes, author tags, and multiple citations in chapter 3 of *Understanding the Founding* suggest, the Straussians have presented a forceful and (in places) telling critique of methodological precepts of the Cambridge school and its American counterpart, proponents of the republican interpretation. Furthermore, Wood has excoriated the Straussians as fundamentalists and the Straussians are leading targets of Skinner and Pocock.

Contrary to Zinman's suggestion, however, Straussians are hardly the only scholars to identify the methodological errors of the linguistic contextualists, to resist their approach to the study of the history of political thought, or to conceive of political theory as a humanistic and historical, but ultimately philosophical endeavor. In developing my critique of the linguistic contextualists, I swept the field widely and attempted to “bring together and order many of the criticisms of the methodology of linguistic contextualism [set forth] over the past thirty years” (Gibson 2007, n. 73, 242). In doing so, I turned to Straussians including Nathan Tarcov, Michael Zuckert, Paul Rahe, Thomas Pangle, and Ralph Lerner because they made sensible and forceful critiques, but I also found important insights into the character, strengths, and weaknesses of this approach in Joyce Appleby, Mark Bevir, John Patrick Diggins, Margaret Leslie, and Charles Tarlton (*ibid.*, 111-29 and nn. 73-117, 242-48, especially n. 73). Furthermore, contrary to Zinman's assertion, the linguistic contextualists take aim not only at the Straussians, but at a large

group of philosophers, historians, and political theorists. In his seminal article “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” Skinner challenges not only Strauss and Straussians, but W. B. Gwyn, J. W. Gough, Arthur Lovejoy, Ernst Cassirer, M. J. C. Vile, Maurice Cranston, George Sabine, Bertrand Russell, and C. B. Macpherson (Skinner 1988). These scholars and numerous other younger political theorists—Straussian and non-Straussian alike—have defended the study of the history of political thought as a humanistic and philosophical endeavor.

Are the errors that I identified in some Straussian scholarship endemic to their methodology or merely incidental to it? By now, my answer ought to be obvious: the problems that I have identified in *some* Straussian scholarship on the Founding are *not* somehow endemic within their methodology or peculiar to it. Because of their interest in philosophical truth, some Straussians exaggerate the degree to which the writings of historical actors were the product of a transhistorical dialogue rather than of particular problems presented within a particular political culture. As discussed below, I also question the applicability of the “ancients versus moderns” historical framework for understanding the political thought of the American Founders (though not necessarily for other philosophers and philosophical statesmen). As Zinman notes, however, it is “absurd” to suggest that Straussian scholarship ignores historical context (121). Sound Straussian scholarship is often an antidote to unsound Straussian scholarship and, as Zinman observes, my scholarship is informed by—and indeed celebrates—the studies of Zuckert, Tarcov, and other Straussians. Even my opposition to the applicability of the “ancients versus modern” historical framework springs from my concern that this framework does not meet a basic interpretative axiom that Straussians (though again not exclusively) have championed, namely that sound interpretations must first express the self-understanding of those who are being interpreted. In short, then, I share with Straussians a belief in the possibility of objective historical analysis, the importance of the quest for truth in history, and the importance of pursuing interpretations that express the self-understanding of philosophers and philosophical statesmen. Fortunately, however, I am hardly alone among those outside of Straussian circles who hold these commitments.

#### MULTIPLE TRADITIONS

Zinman’s meticulous exploration of *Understanding the Founding* continues in his analysis of chapter 4. In this section of his critique, Zinman challenges several characterizations that I have made of Founding

scholarship (particularly those of Martin Diamond), reinforces some of my suggestions for advancing the ongoing debate over the intellectual origins of the American republic, but also offers an “amendment” to one of these suggestions and “some refinement” to another (132). The broader goal underlying these challenges and suggestions is to defend the proposition that the Founders were thoroughgoing moderns. As I see it, Zinman’s defense of this proposition has three interrelated components. First, he suggests that my concerns about existing scholarship can be resolved by adopting the liberal interpretation as it has been set forth by Zuckert, Tarcov, and, if they are correctly interpreted, Rahe and Diamond. Second, Zinman agrees with my contention that the Founders were not “possessive individualists” or “liberal pluralists,” but criticizes me for not naming the proponents of this interpretation and wants to establish that none of the Straussians can be properly interpreted as saying that they were. My effort to group Diamond with proponents of the “possessive individualist” and “liberal pluralist” interpretation, according to Zinman, misconstrues his interpretation, fails to differentiate between his early and late work, and obscures my underlying agreement with his interpretations and those of Rahe and Zuckert. Third, Zinman argues that my suggestion that the Founders’ self-understanding was formed in opposition to early modern absolutism, not classical political philosophy, confuses theory and practice and expresses “at best a half-truth”(133). The Founders’ opposition to monarchy and early modern absolutism, according to Zinman, was itself rooted in a deeper and more profound opposition to classical natural right.

My designation of certain interpretations of the American Founding as “possessive individualist” and “liberal pluralist” was meant to serve as a kind of shorthand for reductionistic accounts of the origins of liberalism and the original design of the American political system that were especially prominent during the Cold War but have now been superseded by an abundance of scholarship stressing the “virtues of liberalism.” Even if they are not named directly in the text, proponents of these interpretations were explicitly cited in *Understanding the Founding*. The “liberal pluralist” and “possessive individualist” interpretation, I argued, was espoused by Diamond, Louis Hartz, George Will, Richard Hofstadter, Benjamin Barber, Robert Dahl, Sheldon Wolin, Arthur Lovejoy and, more recently, Thomas Pangle, Jennifer Nedelsky, Richard Matthews, and John Patrick Diggins (Gibson 2007, n. 9, 252, n. 52, 257-58, and nn. 78-82, 263). James Kloppenberg, J. David Greenstone, David Ericson, Jerome Huyler, Richard Sinopoli, Joshua Foa Dienstag, James Young, Tarcov, and Zuckert were cited as scholars who

have stressed the capaciousness of early modern liberalism and the Founders' political thought (*ibid.*, nn. 13-15 and n. 24, 252-53).

Zinman does not have to convince me of the value of Tarcov's and Zuckert's interpretations. Indeed, one of the explicit conclusions of *Understanding the Founding* is that the complex, capacious, and compassionate liberalism that Tarcov identified in Locke and Zuckert has located in the American Founders is one of the strongest frameworks for interpreting the American Founding. These interpretations, I argue, need to be supplemented with an analysis of the importance of inegalitarian and ascriptive ideologies (which, in turn, brings into question whether liberalism is really the core of the Founders' political thought) and informed by a keener appreciation for the complex and ambivalent character of eighteenth-century political economy. But once this is done, we have come a long way towards the creation of a framework that integrates what we have learned and captures the basic outlines of the Founders' political thought.

Rahe's mammoth account also was not—and should not be—included among narrow “possessive individualist” and “liberal pluralist” interpretations of the Founding. Rahe treats the American regime as a “deliberately contrived mixed regime of sorts.” It was “liberal and modern, first of all,” he argues, “but in its insistence that to vindicate human dignity one must demonstrate man's capacity for self-government, republican and classical as well” (Rahe 1992, x). The Founders were liberals in the sense that they accepted Hobbes' rejection of Aristotelian teleology (there was, Hobbes declared, no *summum bonum*) and adopted the bourgeois view of man as a quarrelsome, acquisitive, and a “tool making animal” (*ibid.*, 397-98, 562, 571, 584-85). They were also liberals in the sense that they believed that the American regime was founded upon natural rights and consent and designed to protect rights (especially property) and promote peace and economic prosperity.

The Founders, however, were also, according to Rahe, indebted to the classical heritage. They were deeply read in the classics and thereby inspired to seek true political greatness. Indeed, they were quintessential examples of the *kaloskagathos* (the noble and good gentleman honored by the ancients). The political system they crafted institutionalized a small “middle ground” for politics and effective statesmanship and was based on an understanding of separation of powers and the distribution of offices and honors that would harness the ambition and pride of the nation's best men, educate the general public in their example, and indirectly foster “a virtue of

sorts” (ibid., 602). According to Rahe, then, the Founders quite consciously combined liberal fundamentals about the nature of man and the origins and ends of government with a “*restricted* appropriation of the classical heritage” in order to fortify liberalism against its destructive tendencies (ibid., 570).

Because of its breadth, intricacies, and contributions (including its complex account of the relationship of liberalism and republicanism in the political thought of the Founders), *Republics: Ancient and Modern* probably should have been given a more prominent place in chapter 4. Still, it is difficult to conceive of Rahe’s account as a *multiple* traditions interpretation. For Rahe, there have been really only two traditions of political thought—ancient and modern. His study is concerned with establishing sharp distinctions between ancient and modern political thought, not with the convergences between the array of idioms from the Scottish Enlightenment, common law, Christianity, British opposition ideology, liberalism, republicanism, and egalitarian and ascriptive ideologies that have been identified in the Founders’ political thought (Gibson 2006, 18-21). This consideration makes me unwilling to recommend *Republics: Ancient and Modern* as the model for future scholarship on the intellectual foundations of the American republic, which is not to deny that it is, in many ways, a profound and important book.

This brings us to Diamond’s remarkably influential essays on the Founders and the question of whether or not Diamond held to the central tenets of the “possessive individualist” and “liberal pluralist” interpretations of the Founding. As Zinman suggests, Diamond never said that the Founders rejected all substantive conceptions of the public good and never denied that some degree of virtue was a necessary condition for the health of a popular government. As Zinman also observes and Catherine and Michael Zuckert have established, Diamond’s late writings suggest a switch in this thinking and express his profound concern to defend the American regime by understanding its peculiar excellences and how they were inculcated in the citizenry (Zuckert and Zuckert 2006, 209-17, 253-59). The best example of Diamond’s final thoughts on this subject is set forth in “Ethics and Politics: The American Way,” where Diamond provides a defense of the American regime based upon an account of the accession of excellences that, he argued, it has fostered. After suggesting earlier in the same essay that the American regime rested on the “solid but low” foundations of the “New Science of Politics” that “emancipates and actively employs” narrow, selfish interests, Diamond noted that this was not the “whole story” of America (Diamond

1979, 59, 62). In the American regime, Diamond now argued, the acquisitive American had to exercise restraint and the “bourgeois virtues” of frugality, economy, moderation, labor, and prudence in order to satisfy his quest for expanding his material comforts. Furthermore, acting on the Tocquevillian principle of “self-interest properly understood,” Americans would freely give to others and employ their time and energies for the good of the state, especially in the exercise of self-government. At its height, the American regime would also insure that members of its “natural aristocracy” were elevated to positions of leadership and would provide a “not inhospitable home to the love of learning” (ibid., 65, 66, 68).

Diamond’s analysis of the original design of the American political system was more subtle than most of his contemporaries’. Indeed, the sections of the American government textbook he wrote that have been republished as a book that remains in print today provide a remarkably sophisticated and enduring interpretation of the Founders’ understanding of the peculiar purposes served by each of the branches and the goals of separation of powers (Diamond 1981, 61-98). Zinman is correct to observe that Diamond explicitly rejects James McGregor Burns’ “deadlock of democracy” interpretation that was so popular during the 1960s (Diamond 1992). Diamond was also too close a student of *The Federalist* to accept the proposition that the government created under the original constitution would be a “Machine that would run itself.” Instead, Diamond preceded David Epstein in emphasizing that Publius saw the institutional structure of the original design as a means of promoting “competent” and “good” government (Epstein 1984, 162-92). Unlike many pluralists, Diamond argued that the Founders believed that representatives might, at times, represent something more than their constituents’ interests and that he was a vehement opponent of positivism (the preferred methodology of the pluralists).

Still, while Diamond may never have argued that the Founders rejected all conceptions of the “public good” or “common interest,” his extant writings contain, as far as I am aware, no effort to interpret what those concepts meant to the Founders and no suggestion that they figured prominently in the Founders’ political thought (Gibson 1993, 1999). When he examined the Founders’ understandings of “justice” and “happiness” in his first and perhaps most famous essay, “Democracy and *The Federalist*,” Diamond concluded that these concepts were seemingly reducible to the protection of economic rights and “physical preservation from external



and internal danger *and* in the comforts afforded by a commercial society” (Diamond 1959, 63; Diamond’s emphasis).

Although Diamond’s later writings begin to stress the capaciousness of liberalism and the virtues that sustain it, “Ethics and Politics” also suggests the momentum of Diamond’s earlier affinity for propositions that map onto the “possessive individualist” interpretation. Like proponents of this interpretation, Diamond still argued that the understanding of human nature underlying the “new science of politics” accepted by the Founders was Hobbesian. Richard Hofstadter was not wrong, Diamond maintained in “Ethics and Politics,” to suggest that the Founders believed in the “rapacious self-interestedness” of man. Madison and the architects of the Constitution, Diamond further emphasized, had given up on traditional efforts to use law to form the character of the citizenry and no longer believed that reputation, religion, or a concern for the public good could restrain the citizenry. Instead, within the American political system, the “defect of better motives” had to be addressed by checking vice with vice. This “acceptance and counterpoised use of ambitious interest as the principal security for the public good,” Diamond maintained, “smacked much of ‘private vice, public good’” (Diamond 1979, 61, 57).

Furthermore, although he vehemently rejected the methodological precepts of the pluralists and did not believe that the American political system was self-regulating, Diamond set forth a standard pluralist interpretation of the Founders’ understanding of representation and how public policies would be formed. Representatives, Diamond argued, would be spokesmen for the interest groups dominant in their district and thus “may be loyally prepared to sacrifice the national interest to their extreme demands” (Diamond 1981, 78). In Congress, “heterogeneous and fluctuating” legislative majorities would form in a process of coalition building among self-interested representatives (Diamond 1979, 68). Diamond’s account of the “tranquil, modern politics of interest groups” established by Madison and the Framers places him much closer to the pluralists’ belief that the primary purpose of the national government was the integration and accommodation of interests than to the far more accurate and appealing interpretation that Madison was a proponent of “deliberative democracy” and hoped to give Congressmen enough initial independence from interest groups to allow them to exercise impartial representation (Diamond 1979, 54; Gibson 1991).

In short, then, even in his later writings as he developed a new appreciation for the virtues of liberalism, Diamond argued that the

Founders accepted a Hobbesian view of man, suggested that they believed that compounded vice would promote public purposes, and contended that the political system that they crafted was designed to integrate and accommodate interests. These are signature components of a “possessive individualist” and “liberal pluralist interpretation”—albeit one marked by particular nuance and peculiar insight.

Three still broader points are raised in Zinman’s “amendment” to my suggestion that we investigate the Founders’ conception of civil society and his “refinement” of my provocation that we examine the Founders’ political thought as an effort to repudiate modern monarchical absolutism by crafting a modern republicanism rather than as a quarrel between the ancients and the moderns. First, Zinman’s suggestion that the American Founding involved not only a transition from republicanism to liberalism, but also from aristocracy to democracy, is well founded. I never meant to suggest the movement from liberalism to republicanism was the only important transition worth studying or to ignore the provocative questions that Zinman raises. As numerous scholars have suggested, the Founders saw themselves as gentlemen-statesmen concerned that “enlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm” (*Federalist* No. 10 [Madison]; in Hamilton et al. 1961, 60). The Founders’ perceptions of the differences between the generation of statesmen who engaged in the act of founding and those who came later points not only to their understanding of the accelerating transitions that they faced in their political culture, but also to their understanding of the relative importance of statesmanship versus institutional design in the preservation of that creation. By all means, we should continue to examine this transition and the questions it raises as well as the one from liberalism to republicanism.

Second, as Zinman notes, throughout *Understanding the Founding* I turn to the Jeffersonians and in particular their conception of political economy to emphasize the persistence of republican concerns among the Founders. My most recent research on Madison’s evolving economic vision for the nation suggests that such a conclusion, which rested heavily on Drew McCoy’s account, may have been, in part at least, misplaced. Although I still believe that Madison’s thoughts and policies regarding the political economy of the nascent republic were deeply concerned with issues about the character of the American citizenry, I no longer believe (with McCoy) that Madison held a republican freeholder conception of property. Madison, I have come to believe, held a dynamic, Lockean conception of property, was

opposed only to forced or “unnatural” forms of economic development (not all manufacturing), and generally favored a complex economy with a substantial division of labor (Gibson 2008; McCoy 1980, 120-35).

Whether aspects of the republican interpretation of Madisonian political economy are misplaced or not, however, we should not return to Diamond’s “extended commercial republic” interpretation. Diamond’s reading of *Federalist* No. 10 was originally set forth as an interpretation of how the United States had averted a class struggle and remains bound up in this initial—highly politicized—context (Gibson 1993). Furthermore, in deriving this interpretation, Diamond did not engage in even a preliminary consideration of the relevant speeches and writings by Madison on political economy. His interpretation contains no analysis of Madison’s speeches in the first Congress or his writings on political economy for *The National Gazette*—where Madison presents ideas that are, to put the matter graciously, quite different than those that Diamond attributed to him or at least defended under Madison’s name.

Most broadly, we should be wary of the general application of even the most subtle formulations of the “commercial republican” interpretation. This interpretive construct is not used simply to suggest that the Founders were advocates of commerce and committed to the republican form of government. In this form, it would be true and innocuous, but also so diffusive as to be emptied of content. It is also used to suggest that the Founders accepted the sublimation of politics to economics (the Jeffersonians emphatically did not) and that the Jeffersonians and Federalists had similar understandings of political economy—after all, both were “commercial republicans”—when in fact contrasting projections of America’s economic development were a central source of their disputes.

Third and most importantly, the question of whether or not we should view the Founders’ political thought as a product of the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns, I would suggest at this point, will be won or lost as a result of a much greater amount of investigation and evidence than has heretofore been given either in my efforts at provocation or Zinman’s dismissal—he politely calls it a “refinement”—of this suggestion. What is needed at this point is nothing less than a comprehensive study of the Founders’ self-understanding of the history of political thought. Such an analysis would need to address a series of questions the answers to which have heretofore been mostly assumed. In what ways did the Founders see themselves as opponents of the ancients? Did they view all of the moderns

alike and as their allies? What was the place not only of Greece, but also of Rome in their political thought? What was the Founders' frame of reference? Were they engaged first in a "battle of the books" pitting the political science of Aristotle against that of Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Locke, or were they first interested in distancing their new nation from the corruption and absolutism of early modern Europe? Most broadly, did they view their project across a great divide that conflated ancient and medieval philosophy and practice on one side and put Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke and the moderns on the other?

In the absence of such a study, Rahe and Zinman evoke important, but hardly decisive points, in favor of the proposition that the Founders saw themselves as moderns and, like the Straussians, saw the history of political thought as a battle between the ancients and moderns. Rahe makes much of the Founders' identification of their handiwork as a *novus ordo seclorum* (Rahe 1992, 7, 49, 248, 336-37). Zinman states flatly that "on the level of theory, it is difficult to deny that the Founders understood the history of philosophy or science—and thus the history of political thought—in terms of a quarrel between the ancients and moderns, understood themselves to be engaged in that quarrel, and understood themselves to be moderns" (133). Jefferson, Zinman elaborates, took his intellectual bearings from the champions of the Enlightenment. Jefferson's party adopted the Scots' understanding of a new science of political economy. Moreover, the Founders neither admired nor intended to adopt ancient practices. Indeed, they were especially emphatic in rejecting the proposition that governments should directly foster the moral development of the citizenry. More generally, Zinman argues that the Founders' opposition to monarchical absolutism was rooted in their prior commitment to natural rights and governments based on the consent of the governed and conversely illustrated their opposition to the belief that some have a natural right to rule over others without their consent. Whatever their immediate arguments and opponents, Zinman suggests, the Founders were self-conscious and unflinching opponents of classical natural right and classical political philosophy.

In raising questions about the applicability of the ancients-moderns framework to the Founders' political thought, I am not arguing for the identity of the Founders' thought with that of the ancients. Far from it, one of my explicit conclusions in this chapter was the *distance* of the Founders' political thought from the classical republican understanding of the nature of man and the purposes of government. Unquestionably, the Founders saw self-preservation and the protection of natural rights as proper

ends of government. Jefferson not only surrounded himself with a pantheon of Enlightenment figures, he found no reason to lament the loss of Aristotle's political writings because the "the introduction of this new principle of representative democracy has rendered useless almost everything written before on the structure of government" (To Isaac H. Tiffany, August 26, 1816; in Yarbrough 2006, 246). Jefferson also excoriated Plato and his followers, stated that he did not have the "patience to go through a whole dialogue," and argued that *The Republic* was filled with such "whimsies," "puerilities," and "unintelligible jargon" as to make it impossible to understand how such "nonsense" could have ever gained the reputation it had (To John Adams, July 5, 1814; in Cappon 1959, II, 432). Jefferson celebrated the "something new under the sun" that innovations—especially those in political science—brought with them, such as the wave of public opinion that swept the young republic at his own election (To Dr. Joseph Priestley, March 21, 1801; in Yarbrough 2006, 197). Yet another important point here is that when the Founders speak explicitly of "improvements" to the science of politics, they have in mind advances over ancient practices, especially the organization of ancient confederations and polis democracy in which a "small number of citizens" "assemble and administer the Government in person" (*Federalist* No. 10 [Madison]; in Hamilton et al. 1961, 61). The five improvements in the "science of politics" that Hamilton lists in *The Federalist* No. 9—separation of powers, legislative checks and balances, an independent judiciary, representation, and the extended republic—are improvements in the means in which republicanism is secured (*Federalist* No. 9 [Hamilton]; in Hamilton et al. 1961, 51).

If I agree that the Founders saw themselves as creating a *novus ordo seclorum*, I am, however, far from convinced that they did so on the terms and with the frame of reference that the "ancients versus moderns" narrative suggests. Within the Straussian narrative, classical political philosophy refers essentially to Aristotle and Plato. Liberalism springs forth tightly conceived and fully formed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as the result of an intellectual revolution conducted by a few like-minded geniuses, including principally Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Locke. These political philosophers, according to this tidy and unambiguous philosophical account, consciously and comprehensively rejected ancient political philosophy. In doing so, they are said to have rejected the view of man as a political animal in favor of the proposition that he is a quarrelsome, acquisitive, and tool-making one. Ancient regimes are said to have used law as an

instrument of *paideia* or character formation. Modern ones are said to have accepted man's selfishness, emancipated his passions, and then relied on institutional devices and the private sphere to constructively channel these interests and passions. The ancients are said to have believed in the natural right of the philosophical few to govern without the consent of the many; the moderns are said to have believed that governments rest on the consent of the governed.

At this point, I have at least five misgivings with applying this framework to the study of the American Founders. First, this framework cannot account for the affinity that the Founders had for the ancients and their tendency to see themselves as carrying on a noble task begun by the ancients. At minimum, although the Founders rejected the proposition that man is a political animal who becomes fully human only inside a political community where he is both a ruler and a citizen, they nevertheless, as even Rahe admits, saw themselves as carrying on the ancient quest to preserve liberty and vindicate man's capacity for self-government (Rahe 1992, x, 570). As the numerous Greek and Roman pseudonyms that they assumed illustrate, they also identified themselves with ancient founders. Why also this peculiar love for Greek and Roman architecture and literature among a group of men who had supposedly rejected the ancients?

Second, the Founders did not couple Hobbes and Locke as the authors of a compelling critique of classical republicanism. Few Straussians are of course arguing that the Founders embraced the Hobbesian solution to the problem of man's estranged and violent nature. Most are instead arguing that the Founders "*tacitly acknowledged* the force of the critique" that Hobbes lodged against Aristotle's belief that man is a political animal, especially as this critique was tamed and translated by Locke (*ibid.*, 584; my emphasis). In the big picture, Straussians almost uniformly suggest, the Founders were with Hobbes. Still, I do not know of a single statement of affinity for Hobbes among the American Founders, even one that suggests that Hobbes got the big picture about the nature of man right even though he was wrong to suggest a Leviathan as a solution to it. Instead, Hobbes is treated in the Founders' political thought as a moral relativist and opponent of natural law who is wrong in his assumptions about human nature and equally wrong in his solution (Hamilton 1775). Unlike the Straussians, the Founders did not suggest that Hobbes and Locke were equally deserving of praise. Instead, they saw Hobbes as the proponent of the poison of absolutism against which Lockean liberalism was an ingredient in the antidote.

Third, the evidence has not been provided to suggest that the Founders accepted the polarities set forth in the “ancients versus moderns” framework and believed that these were their choices. Can Zinman take me to a document in which any Founder discusses whether or not to employ law as a means of character formation or alternatively to rely on institutions or the private sphere to serve that role? Again to use a single example, Madison seems to have believed that constitutions and laws, institutions, and the economy would each have an effect on the ethos of the nation and the character of its citizenry, even as he explicitly rejected an effort to suppress faction and create *homonoia* “by giving to every citizen the same opinions, the same passions, and the same interests” (*Federalist* No. 10 [Madison]; in Hamilton et al. 1961, 58). Again, the Founders simply did not think through these issues as Straussians do.

Fourth, the “ancients versus moderns” narrative does not capture the frame of reference of the Founders or the complexity or ambiguity of the Founders’ political thought. To be sure, Jefferson presents the proposition that legitimate governments rest on the consent of the governed as a universal precept. Jefferson would have been enraged by the idea that the philosophical few should have the right to rule over others without their consent. But who was arguing to Jefferson in favor of rule by the philosophical few? Jefferson’s frame of reference here is clearly not in opposition to classical natural right, but to the concept of a divine right of kings. And contrary to Zinman’s assertion, there is no evidence that Jefferson believed that his opposition to divine right sprang from a deeper opposition to classical natural right.

Finally, the “ancients versus moderns” framework mistakenly suggests that the Founders’ liberalism is also our own. Nowhere was this more evident than in Martin Diamond’s scholarship. Diamond used the term “American political development” long before it took on the connotations that it now has as a subfield in American politics (Diamond 1959, 52). Still, there is very little room in Diamond’s analysis for understanding the historical transformations of American institutions. Indeed, his Aristotelian approach leads him to conclude that the constitutional system virtually determined the subsequent character of American politics. The modern system of interest group politics under which we live, Diamond argued, grew directly out of the original design of the American political system and Madison’s acceptance of the “new science of politics.” My research has suggested quite the opposite—i.e., that far from being a realization of Madison’s aspirations, the operations of the American political system today are a Madisonian nightmare.

These five concerns suggest that we need to at least investigate an alternative to the “ancients versus moderns” narrative for understanding the Founding. At this point, the most promising one has been offered by Andreas Kalyvas and Ira Katznelson who, I would suggest, have given flesh to the propositions suggested earlier by Marvin Meyers (Kalyvas and Katznelson 2008; Meyers 1980). Kalyvas and Katznelson argue that, far from being the creation of a few geniuses bent on repudiating classical republicanism, liberalism emerged as a “conceptual hybrid both against and within” the republican tradition. The republican tradition, according to this account, was recovered in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century by a number of philosophers and philosophical statesmen as an anti-monarchical ideology. *Classical* republicanism, however, proved inapplicable to modern conditions. Liberalism was invented from the engagement to fashion a modern republicanism by participants who were nevertheless highly sympathetic to classical concerns and attempted to rephrase them to suit modern conditions, not by a few great philosophers who were determined to repudiate classical republicanism. Such a narrative rejects the idea that liberalism won a victory at the expense of classical republicanism and instead focuses on the “intersecting trajectories of republicanism and liberalism” (Kalyvas and Katznelson, 8). It thus makes it possible to explain how and why the political vocabulary of the Founders and other early moderns combined liberal language about rights, commerce, and the inevitable heterogeneity of interests with republican idioms including virtue and the public good and understood liberty both as independence to pursue public affairs and noninterference from the government.

#### AUTHORITY

In this final section of his critique, Zinman revisits the most foundational questions that I address in my two books, including which multiple traditions approach serves as the best framework for capturing the political thought of the American Founders, the role of the original constitutional structure in the development and character of American democracy, the Founders’ enduring contributions to the history of political thought, and finally questions about the source and character of their authority. With regard to the multiple traditions approach, Zinman argues here that, although I appear to want yet another middle ground between scholarly interpretations, I have really chosen Rogers Smith’s multiple traditions approach over Michael Zuckert’s. Zuckert is silent on the place of inegalitarian and ascriptive ideologies in the political thought of the Founders; Smith has established



their undeniable presence and persistence in that thought; thus, Smith's multiple traditions approach is superior for capturing the traditions of political thought that the Founders held and explaining the relationship between these different traditions.

Zinman is correct that my account ultimately elevates Smith's multiple traditions approach over Zuckert's, though I hasten to point out that my effort to integrate their multiple traditions approaches was driven more by my profound respect for both than by any effort to obscure my differences with Zuckert (which are made explicit and otherwise dwarfed by my debts to his scholarship). As I point out in *Understanding the Founding*, Smith's case for the conceptual identity of inegalitarian and ascriptive ideologies is that they constitute popular and persistence traditions of American political thought, have influenced public policy, and have been defended by leading intellectuals. Zinman is also correct that exploring the role of inegalitarian and ascriptive ideas calls into question the legitimacy of the Founders' thought, challenges the proposition that liberalism served as its core, erects barriers to its appropriation, and undermines the Founders' authority. These points, however, do not negate Zuckert's numerous insights—especially his insights into the role of religion in American political thought and the continuing tension between Americans' instinctive impulse for Jeffersonian expressive democracy and the Madisonian constitutional framework. They mean instead that Zuckert's insights should be fed back into a framework that includes an appreciation for inegalitarian and ascriptive ideologies. At this point, it remains for Zuckert to reply to Smith and either to suggest the place of inegalitarian and ascriptive ideologies in the Founders' political thought or explain why they should not be considered among the traditions within the American amalgam.

Three final issues are raised by Zinman's insightful and suggestive comments about the topics raised in chapter 5. First, I have no delusions that my list of the Founders' contributions to the history of political thought is comprehensive. Zinman's suggestion that the most important contribution of the Founders to the history of political thought was their effort to establish liberal democracy as the best and only fully legitimate form of government or, put differently, that they sought to establish that "the principles of liberalism, rightly understood, entail republicanism" (138) should be fully explored. This is apparently the conclusion that Zinman has formed over a lifetime of careful study of the Founding and thus will be best established by him.

Second, Zinman raises important questions in this section about whether or not my opposition to foundationalism can be reconciled with my earlier statements about the “permanent” contributions of the American Founders to the history of political thought and my critique of the linguistic contextualists based on the proposition that the study of the history of political thought should be undertaken with an eye toward philosophical truth. Put concisely, the pursuit of philosophical truth and permanent contributions does not become a stifling foundationalism unless these truths and contributions are no longer subjected to critical reasoning and appraisal. My approach here is rooted in nothing more elaborate than the Socratic tradition of skepticism that rests on both the possibility of philosophical truth and the importance of continuously subjecting those “truths” to questioning. To be sure, the conclusions we draw from studying the American Founding merit our strongest allegiance and fiercest defense and can form the basis of much of our political reasoning. They should never, however, be considered “first principles”—if such a proposition means that they are placed outside of the boundaries of critical inquiry.

All of this leads to a final set of observations about the authority of the American Founders. Clearly a distinction must be made here between the Founders’ legal and moral authority. In *Understanding the Founding*, I was not speaking directly to the debate over the legal authority of the Framers’ and ratifiers’ understanding of the Constitution. Unlike Zinman, I do not accept the proposition that constitutional originalism necessarily follows from the doctrine of popular sovereignty, but I do not have space to address that question adequately in this format. Instead, the final section of *Understanding the Founding* broaches questions about the consequences for our political culture of the familiar but problematic *moral* authority that the Founders have been given.

On these issues, I remain as conflicted as when I finished this book. On the one hand, the Founders’ accomplishments were many. Most importantly, they adopted, articulated, and refined the best political principles that have been formulated in the history of political thought and gave them institutional form. In many areas, they were progressive for their own time and made important efforts to address the injustices they faced. Thus, many of the criticisms lodged against them are misplaced and, in some cases, outright wrong. To teach only what they did not accomplish or to treat them with antiquarian detachment, not only diminishes what they achieved and what they set in motion, it robs us of central dimensions of our national

identity and leaves us without important resources for thinking through some of our most difficult problems. Put positively, holding them and their handiwork in esteem has doubtlessly contributed, as Madison suggests in the passage quoted by Zinman from *Federalist* No. 49, to the stability and longevity of the American political system and the social cohesion that is a very real accomplishment of our history.

On the other hand, the Founders are deeply implicated in some of our darkest legacies, including slavery, racism, the subjugation of women and the tradition of inequality that followed it, and the cultural genocide that accompanied Indian removal. To suggest otherwise is both immoral and impractical. It is immoral because it minimizes or ignores the injustices that were committed against numerous Americans. It is impractical because we are not going back to the filiopietistic study of the American Founding. For all of its excesses, multi-cultural analysis has profoundly broadened and deepened our understanding of all phases of American history and American political development, including the Founding. Furthermore, if ignoring or trashing the Founders robs us of essential aspects of our national identity and may weaken our social unity, we should also be aware of the limitations to a political discourse bounded so heavily by its origins. If we approach all our problems as restoration politics or let our respect for the Founders turn into obsequiousness, we risk losing sight of the very real progress that has been made in a number of areas—including our understanding of democracy—since they lived. If the Founders remind us that democracy requires a defense and must be tamed to be consistent with good government, an undue reverence for them can lead us to fail to apply to our constitutional system another venerable American tradition—our pragmatic and innovative spirit.

This is no simple call for “two cheers” for the Founders. Nor is it an historicist’s plea that understanding them within their cultural context will provide a prophylactic against hasty judgments about them. Ultimately, the final chapter of *Understanding the Founding* pointed to the need for a way out of the cycle of celebration and condemnation that follows the Founders and called for a more complex and subtle interpretation of their legacy. We need such interpretations not only because the Founders were complex men and cannot be truly understood in any other way, but because, it seems, how Americans understand and judge the Founders profoundly and inseparably affects how we understand ourselves.

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## Diodotus and Thucydides

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Thucydides presents his readers with what he considered to be the greatest event of all time, the Peloponnesian War. He thought it to be the political event *par excellence* which exceeded anything hitherto heard of or seen, anything else known (Thucydides 1996, 1.1.2). It lasted for twenty-seven years, reached as far as Asia and Sicily, included Greeks and barbarians, and, presumably, afforded all those who had eyes to see and ears to hear something truly everlasting.

In the proem to his work proper, Thucydides lays out two different threads of thought, the political and the philosophic. That Thucydides brings to light the political is manifest to any of his readers from the moment his book is picked up to the moment it is put down. And just as obvious, but much less articulated and hence less clear—for it is announced only twice and never forthrightly explicated by Thucydides himself—is his stated philosophical intention: to give his readers the opportunity to look into the timeless truth about things done in political life, things which, according to the nature of humanity, may be done once more (1.22.4; see Addendum 1). Thus, *The Peloponnesian War* is about a particular event in time of the greatest magnitude, while it is also the particular means through which the universal or unchanging human nature is brought to light.

As one comes to see, the interplay between these two features of particularity and universality occurs with very good reason, for the human being is such that his actions require not only justification before others, but more importantly justification before himself. For as Thucydides will eventually show, even during the most calamitous times of lawless extravagance, men do not simply rid themselves of their concern for what is just,

honorable, courageous, and moderate (2.53, 3.82, and 5.105). Man's constant need to justify his actions in light of virtue thereby elicits his attempt to do so, and that attempt invariably provides his opinion on such matters and thus implies he has an understanding of what is ultimately right for man as man. Accordingly, there are many characters within Thucydides' pages who profess, either openly or implicitly, to have acquired such an understanding and so presume to have philosophic knowledge. Only one of them, however, seems to be akin to Thucydides. That man is Diodotus. That this is so, why it is so, and what this implies I hope to have made plain by this paper's end.

Diodotus is introduced with the resumption of a previously decided debate that had favored his opponent's proposal (3.41). That debate followed on the heels of the Mytilenean rebellion against her Athenian allies, a rebellion instigated by roughly one thousand aristocrats of the island of Lesbos (3.50, 3.39.6, 3.27.3). Upon hearing of this hostile and seemingly unprovoked act (3.9-3.14), the Athenians were deeply distressed and grieved, overcome as they were by a sense of suffering such a great injustice at the hands of her "friends" during a most calamitous time. For it was precisely during the time of their revolt that the Peloponnesian War proper was flaring up once more and the plague was devastating the Athenian homeland (3.3). Moved as they thus were by an overwhelming sense of justice and need for expediency, the Athenians vigorously set out to subdue their now hostile friends. In successfully doing so—and while also keeping their frightful and indignant rage intact—an Athenian assembly subsequently decided, under the advice of their leading demagogue Cleon, to then punish the Mytileneans by putting their entire adult male population to death and to "make slaves of (all her) women and children" (3.36).

After having thus decided on the fate of their newly found enemies while the edge of their anger had yet to be blunted (3.38.1), the Athenians sent a trireme to communicate their decision to Paches, the commander who had subdued Lesbos and was awaiting further instruction from home. However, just after having done so, Thucydides states that "[t]he morrow brought repentance with it and reflection on the horrid cruelty of a decree which condemned a whole city to the fate merited only by the guilty" (3.46.4). It was, then, this sense of sober regret and reflection by the Athenian people that brought the renewal of the Mytilene debate between Diodotus and his opponent, Cleon. That the Athenians had thus come to regret their earlier decision and wished for another pairing of speeches by these two men shows that they had begun to question whether or not they had previously

been justified in deciding what they did. Cleon and Diodotus are thereby introduced when the question of justification is most conspicuously and self-consciously raised within Thucydides' book. It is thus not overly surprising that, during this self-reflective occasion, we hear of the nature of communities and men *tout court*. For, given the magnitude of this occasion in particular, both Cleon and Diodotus are led to speak of, among other things, the nature of democracy and empire, wisdom and law (3.37-3.38), and necessity and justice (3.39-3.40).

Yet, given the undeniable disparity of understanding between these two men, particularly with regard to the relation between wisdom and law, not only must the future fate of Mytilene be decided with their present debate, so too must the future role of advisers within their own political community. For it is precisely because the exceedingly popular Cleon upbraids the Athenian's for requesting yet another deliberation on the matter at hand—now that they have begun to come to their senses—that Diodotus must not only hope to moderate their still lingering indignation, but to also ward off Cleon's denigration of the very worth of counselors (3.43.3, 3.37.4-3.38.3). By thus attempting to preserve the possibility of (good) counsel within his city, Diodotus' speech likewise attempts to preserve the city itself.

But for this very reason, that speech does more than simply outline the problems of deliberation within his own, democratic Athens. For, as Diodotus will eventually show, the problems raised by Cleon's own demagoguery and misology are also applicable to the citizen qua citizen. As will thus be seen, when and wherever there is more than one advisor to any given city's assembly, the same nature of man—at least as understood by Diodotus—will still be present, and so the same problem of democratic equality that Diodotus brings to light will still hold even if that assembly is not held or run by the *demos*: the few, after all, are still a class apart and so equal amongst themselves (Aristotle 1997, 1305b; see Addendum 2). It is for this very reason that Diodotus' criticisms and warnings of counsel are not only particularly suited to his present purposes, but are also universally applicable in their extent. And it is precisely by virtue of this (philosophic) universality that one can subsequently match Diodotus' present criticisms with the future contraction of the differences between the Spartans (rule of the few) and the Athenians (rule of the many) that Thucydides himself carries out both within his commentary on the Corcyrean revolution and so during his exposition of the nature of man. Accordingly, once both this Diodotean extension and Thucydidean contraction are taken together, they

will be seen to point to a shared understanding of the nature of man, not as oligarch or democrat, but simply as man.

Once, then, Diodotus has taken into account the nature of both Cleon's speech and its relation to the citizen as citizen, he has thereby placed himself in the position to effectively bring about his immediate political intention within his assembly. That he has given this account publicly, however, renders his speech all the more strange. For insofar as he states that the principle obstacle to good council within the city consists in man's avarice—particularly the indignant suspicion leveled against an even beneficent counselor who might possibly benefit himself most of all through the adaptation of his own proposal (3.38.2, 3.38.7)—Diodotus claims that counselors such as himself must necessarily use deception when speaking to their audience. Accordingly, he openly states that he is about to, and so must, lie to his assembly. One is therefore compelled to ask why Diodotus says what he says about human nature, why he draws attention to his imminent lie within his assembly, and in what manner his fellows citizens' suspicion of him is or is not justified. Each of these questions, then, must be answered if he is to be understood both on his own terms and in light of his relation to Thucydides.

After having thus spoken of his present difficulty and so of how man's desire for personal benefit outweighs the concern for the common good or justice, Diodotus sensibly relegates the assembly's discussion about Mytilene away from the question of justice to the matter of expediency (3.44). He would have his fellow citizens act leniently toward the Mytilenes by first recognizing that they, like all men, hope, and that hope and the actions which issue from it cannot be prevented and so should not be impractically penalized by any law (3.45.3). He then further justifies his claim in light of three proposed characteristics of the nature of man (3.45.8-12): First, poverty is said to give men the courage of necessity to resist restraints. Second, plenty fills them with ambition and hence insolence and pride (there are other conditions or fortunes of life too that are subject to some fatal and master passion; these, however, are not named). Third, men and cities are said to be moved by hope and *eros*. But as for hope and *eros* in particular, they are said to affect all conditions of men and so to be universally at work, to cause the widest ruin, and to be invisible agents which are least discerned though far stronger than any other dangers which are actually seen. What's more, fortune is said to further feed the delusion belonging to both hope and *eros* (which are hereby understood as being delusional) so that it is said to be

impossible to prevent human nature from doing what it has set its mind to do when given the presence and so agency of these two conditions.

Even though Diodotus has thus given voice to what he understands to be humanity's unruly and even delusional nature so as to help quell Athens' anger, he has further implied that there is an inherent connection between that nature and our thought. Accordingly, he suggests that it is only once our minds have had hope and *eros* decide on a matter for us that we are then compelled to act foolishly. He therefore elicits the question as to whether or not it is possible to understand the nature of such desire before it has taken hold of the mind.

Indeed, Diodotus points in the direction of this very question when speaking of future and unapparent things needing demonstration through words (3.42.2). Though his comment's immediate bearing is such that it prepares the way for a sober refutation of Cleon's misology (3.37-40), by the end of Diodotus' speech its applicability extends to or takes into account nothing less than the human condition. For if man's nature is driven principally by hope and *eros*, then people are almost always in a situation where what is desired—as that which is lacking or not presently had and therefore “unseen”—is beyond their present reach. Accordingly, the immediate assembly that has gathered together to decide on the future fate of the Mytilenaeans can be seen as a particular example of the general question of where desire as such points. Just as words are here needed in order to understand what is good for Athens, so too words (deliberation) are needed in order to understand the nature of or what is divined by desire itself. (If one puts together the particular occasion of Diodotus' speech, his desire for Athens to have good counsel concerning future or unseen events, with his general remarks about human nature, that hope and *eros* principally compel men and cities, one may suspect that what is hoped for and desired as such is the good itself.) In this sense, then, Diodotus speaks on a political and philosophic level and thus mirrors the manner of Thucydides' writing.

Insofar as this is so, one should like to know to what extent man's nature as understood by Diodotus relates to Thucydides' conception of it. Or rather, one should like to know if Thucydides' work both agrees with and thus sheds light on Diodotus' implicit question of where man's desire as such points or means, and whether or not he agrees with Diodotus' reason for lying to citizens for the sake of the public good. Such considerations, though requiring a thoroughgoing examination of Thucydides' work as a whole, can nonetheless be discerned by first gleaning his own explicit

statements concerning human nature in his commentary on the Corcyrean revolution, then through a look at the chief differences between the Spartan and Athenian ways of life, and finally by looking to the importance of the story of Harmodius and Aristogeiton. The remainder of this paper thus explicates each of these strands of *The Peloponnesian War* so as to show both the harmony of agreement that exists between Thucydides and his Diodotus, and what that harmony entails.

#### CORCYRA AND CIVIL WAR

When speaking of revolutions in general—and so just before speaking of Corcyra's in particular—Thucydides echoes his earlier stated philosophic intention: the sufferings found during times of revolution are “such as have occurred and always will occur as long as the nature of mankind remains the same” (3.82.2). Civil wars, then, should help bring to light in a more explicit manner than anywhere else throughout *The Peloponnesian War* what Thucydides understands human nature to be. That he should say as much while describing revolutions, and that Diodotus had likewise conveyed his understanding of hubristic, hopeful, and desirous man with respect to the revolution of the Mytileneans against Athens, thus seems promising for showing similarities that these two men might share in their understanding of the human condition.

When beginning his account, Thucydides first introduces a basic difference between times of war and of peace with prosperity, such that to the former belongs sudden imperious necessities or the taking away from the latter the easy supply of daily wants. This wartime deprivation is said to make men's passions go down to the level of their present war-like condition and to worsen their better judgment (3.82.2).

Now it is not immediately clear what one is to make of this overall characterization, for Thucydides has just suggested that, during times of peace, supply of such wants had generally extended to both classes of people, the few and the many. In a way this is commonsensical enough, for to what extent can there possibly be peace without some prosperity in the allotment of such supplies, particularly if their lack constitutes, at least here, the basis for Thucydides' introductory characterization of the meanness of war? However, if this is indeed so, then it cannot be so much poverty or the lack of resources that drives men to revolution. Thucydides is not here pointing to economic grounds for discord. Rather, he points to the ever-present threat of war with or aide from outsiders that serves as the means by which the freeing

of hope for more for oneself and so less for others arises (1.24.3-7, 1.101, 1.104, 3.70-85, 6.95.2, 7.33.5, 8.21, 8.65; Aristotle 1997, 1272b; Machiavelli 1989, Chapter 3). Accordingly, the revolutions that “gripped all of Hellas” seem to presuppose the “outside” war between Athens and Sparta (3.82.1). For it was that “universal” war, and the readiness with which it made flirtations with the two all the easier or more pronounced, that elicited from other men both their vengefulness towards others of their own city—who were perceived to have unjustly acquired more than their fair share—and ambition for themselves, rather than did need. The Peloponnesian War thus gave rise to the enactment of the desire to hurt one’s adversaries and increase one’s own advantages by bringing in either of these two sets of foreigners as allies in revolutionary activities at home. Ironically, however, by thus bringing in either Athenians or Spartans, these revolutionaries were, as Thucydides has just shown, inadvertently bringing upon themselves the attendant worsening of judgment and lowering of the passions to the level of (civil) wartime’s mean necessity. Yet this is but to state that such a desire is implicitly and so already a sign of worse judgment and mean passion (see Addendum 3).

Such behavior is what invariably leads to a heightening of what Thucydides seems to see as man’s essentially lawless nature. For as he is intent to show, those on all sides, whether as supporters of the Athenians or of the Spartans, well-to-do or not, had a ubiquitous and ambitious drive for rule, an omnipresent lascivious greed and lust for power (3.82.6, 8). And it was with such ardent passions that also came the great and ever-greater excess in the refinement of inventions that occurred wherever revolution ran its course. For when it was introduced to a new city, it is said to have brought with it changes or inventions of meaning such that reckless audacity finally became known as courageous loyalty to one’s party, frantic violence manliness, cautious plotting self-defense, and extreme advocates trusted men (3.82.3-4). As one can thus see, an ever-growing delusory understanding and so renaming of the virtues and vices of men accompanied the vengeful and ambitious desires of civil war. But of course, insofar as the simple desire to bring in foreigners and so war to one’s own city already constitutes another sort of worse judgment and mean passion, Thucydides is invariably suggesting that a delusory understanding of the passions of man was already at work and so prior to the onset of the self-deceptive inventions of civil war which he here describes.

This state of affairs cannot help but remind of Diodotus’ warnings of the effects that hope and *eros* have with respect to men in general

(3.45). These two conditions are thus easily likened to Thucydides' present description, for the dangers of these two conditions are likewise present when men worsen their and their city's condition through the introduction of (civil) strife. It is thus not surprising to hear that, just as both the few and the many started out with the presumable intention to both better themselves and their party while hurting those outside it (3.82.6), eventually their partisan zeal was unmasked and shown to be a lawless desire that was ultimately no respecter of party lines, even when presumably working within them. As Thucydides eventually makes plain, these people were at bottom concerned with their own personal interests, interests that they had only, but perhaps self-deceptively, masked under the banner of either party. In the end the revolutionaries were thus violent and dangerous demagogues, so much so that one may say that the cities which convulsed with civil strife and anarchy found them everywhere afoot (3.82.5, 8; 3.83.1).

When, then, Thucydides goes so far as to say that fair proposals of an adversary were met with jealousy and that revenge was more important to men than their own self-preservation (3.82.7), one cannot help but think of Diodotus' assembly run wild (or, to say the same thing somewhat differently, why Cleon was the most popular speaker in Athens after the death of Pericles). Perhaps the most distressing detail of all in his account of the revolution in Corcyra, however, is the relatively late admission that there was nonetheless a moderate part of the citizenry, but that they perished between the two parties, "either for not joining in the quarrel, or because envy would not suffer them to escape" (3.82.8).

As grim as this fact most certainly is, Thucydides uses this most unfortunate admission as a most helpful suggestion. For if the ambition which led to so much internal chaos was also joined by a suffering of the fear of death—as expressed by the resentment at the idea that some might escape it—then one might better understand that ambition and desire as being linked to at least a faint realization of and anger at one's own mortality (see Addendum 4). This suspicion is further strengthened when Thucydides attests that it was from "the hopelessness of a permanent state of things" that all these revolutionary and lawless actions were carried on (3.83.2). One is thus left with the question of the paradoxical relation between the revolutionaries greater desire for revenge than self-preservation, on the one hand, with their fear of death, on the other.

As to what it can possibly mean for a person to wish more for revenge than for being safe from injury, Thucydides has already attributed



this most strange desire to the lust for power, to greed, and ambition (3.82.8). Yet if this is indeed so, then such a preference comes to sight as nothing other than the desire for a pretext by which one is enabled to justify distinguishing oneself from others. Accordingly, one can now note, after having seen that personal interests lie behind partisan zeal, that this is precisely the same character as the initial desire and worsening of judgment belonging to the revolutionaries who, through the pretext of the Peloponnesian War proper, drew in either Athenians or Spartans and so civil war. Such a desire for revenge is thus the same as the already noted, preexisting delusory character of the vengeful and ambitious men that Thucydides' first introduced in his description of the characteristics of men during times of revolution. (But of course, this is only to admit that this preexisting delusory character still needs to be explained in order to make clear how and why the revolutionaries had both poor judgment and mean passion even prior to their becoming revolutionaries.)

As to the strangely attested fear of death and their manifestly treating it lightly, certainly the revolutionaries had a somewhat detached understanding of such fear insofar as they expressed it by means of the resentment they felt toward the possibility of others surviving—and thus not directly or in terms of their own likely death (3.82.4). Could it be, then, that this opaque sense of impending impermanence compelled the revolutionaries all along, thus constituting the bedrock of the already noted delusory ambition and vengeance that preexisted their own, civil wars? Such ignorance or delusion about what compels their reckless audacity certainly helps explain the paradoxical relation Thucydides has here described as existing amongst these men, as it likewise makes clearer why and in what manner their ambition and vengeance prior to the war could already be a sign of blind judgment and mean passion. By thus soliciting from his reader the need to combine the greater desire for revenge rather than safety with a lasting fear of impermanence, Thucydides ultimately points to man's hidden or misunderstood desire to somehow justify obtaining something more for himself, particularly when faced with the prospect of his own impending death.

Insofar as each civil war Thucydides accounts for is said to relate to either Athens or Sparta (3.82.1), perhaps the beginning of the answer to the question of the nature of ambition and vengeance, i.e., how they relate to death and what they aim at, will be further clarified if Thucydides' contraction is now extended by looking to those two different manners of life, Athenian and Spartan.

## SPARTA

Though the Spartans necessarily figure predominately in his account of the war, according to Thucydides they were laconic and thus incapable of expressing what Diodotus claimed is of the nature of man. Indeed, the king Archidamus spoke (in an assembly on the issue of entering into war with Athens) of Sparta's wisdom consisting in her citizens being too little educated to question the laws, and thus implied that good counsel consisted in part in the people's terseness (1.84.3, 4.17.2; see Addendum 5). A Spartan Diodotus, capable of looking beyond the positive law, would thus appear to be utterly unthinkable. Sthenelaidas, one of the ephors who spoke after king Archidamus to the same Spartan assembly, went so far as to say that no man should deliberate after having received an injury, for consultation belongs to the doers of wrong (1.86.4).

One can thus see that, whereas the Athenian Diodotus was able to convince his fellow citizens to act more moderately with respect to Mytilene by giving voice to unseen human nature, the laconic Spartan Sthenelaidas carried the day among his fellow citizens and moved them to vote for war through "uneducated" considerations of law or justice. That there is this possibility of difference between the two, Athens and Sparta, can no longer be surprising once the issue of language and its importance has been brought to light.

Yet the importance of this difference and how it is not simply a consequence of Diodotus' conception of man can be seen once one realizes that it is also expressed in a similar manner by Thucydides' denial that the issue of law actually moved the Spartans to war. It is rather said that they were compelled into it out of fear (1.23.6). That this reason was hidden from sight and that the Spartans fostered obedience through silent habituation to the law thus renders unlikely that she could ever have been cognizant of the true cause of her entering into war (see Addendum 6). For as Diodotus had indicated through his speech, the compulsory is part of human nature and is thereby unseen and so in need of words in order to be brought to light. Thucydides has not only indicated as much through his written narrative, but also silently agrees with Diodotus' sympathy with the hubristic nature of man insofar as the issue of compulsion precludes his ever endorsing the putative guilt of the Spartans for starting the war (see Addendum 7). One can thereby see that in this respect he follows the manner of Diodotus, who would refrain from casting blame on others (3.42). Such political moderation as is exhibited by both these men further hints at their shared understanding

of the human condition. If, then, one were to take into account what has thus far been shown, one might be tempted to say that Athens had more self-knowledge than Sparta could have insofar as she cultivated or enabled there to be men like Thucydides and Diodotus through her liberality and so education (2.38, 40).

#### ATHENS

Athens, then, is clearly distinct from Sparta in manner and way of life, for she is, in contradistinction to her adversary, not only loquacious but also exceedingly ambitious. Such ambition is made plain through the speeches of Pericles and those of the Corinthians before the Spartan assembly (1.140-144, 2.35-46, and 1.70). Her deeds too confirm this fact. The seemingly untimely daring of the Sicilian campaign and the *erotic* longing that overcame the Athenians for its success provide ample proof in this regard (1.144.1, 6.24.3). There is also the unforgettable act of daring by the Athenian businessmen in Sparta who spontaneously rose up and spoke of their desire to exhibit Athenian power, and the justification for and even praiseworthiness of Athens' empire, before her opponents (1.72.1, 76.2-3). One might consequently wonder if Athens, unlike Sparta, was indeed capable of fulfilling the longings of her citizens to the extent that they were allowed to seek out and give voice to their desires rather than stifle them.

However, as Diodotus helps make apparent, and as Thucydides seems to confirm, it is precisely because hope and *eros* affect "all estates of man" that the Athenians neither "took rest themselves nor gave any to others." They did not and could not do so precisely because they were essentially desirous and therefore always lacking what they continuously desired. Thus it was, to use Thucydides' earlier words concerning the nature of man, their blind ambition that spurred them on, an ambition that could not ultimately find political satisfaction. This, of course, is understandably so, for if the desires and passions of men are continuously pointing beyond what "is," or if desire is a desire for an unconditional and so complete good, one's always wanting more suggests that the good one can have is always tentative at best. Understood Socratically, one wants the good to be one's own forever (Plato 2001, 200d-e). Yet it is precisely this "forever" that mankind is essentially incapable of. There is therefore something prescient in the person of Pericles, for he exhorted his fellow Athenians to endeavor to fall in love with Athens for the sake of eternal glory (2.41.1, 4-5, 43.1-4, 64.3-6). Through him, eternal glory appeared as the closest approximation to the forever that mankind instinctually longs for but is incapable of. Periclean Athens, then, seems to

have been able to express more ably than the Spartans or the revolutionaries ever could this instinctual desire and thereby shows why her national character was so resplendent. The question is thus to what extent her cognizance is able to dispel Thucydides' earlier description of the initial delusory character of (revolutionary) man. In other words, is Pericles' Athens still fooling herself even if she understands better than the revolutionaries ever did that it is her own desire to cheat death that spurs her recklessly on?

If looked at from Diodotus' perspective, it would seem that Athens has still fallen short. After all, it is precisely because this Periclean approximation to making the good one's own forever consists in taking eternity itself as the good that it is based on actions that are admittedly mixed with imperishable evils (2.41.4). Yet how can eternal remembrance through political life simply be good if it is also bound with the remembrance of such lasting evil? It would rather seem that this solution to man's desire must be misguided if it is necessarily contradictory. But contradictory it must be, for the attempt to overcome desire's longing, or the ambitious and envious desire to have so much for oneself that all of history must take note, must be based in hubris and therefore carry with it the latter's attendant dangers and follies. Such a self-conscious chasing after eternity, then, remains problematic, if only because it is based in man's unreasonable attempt to make his mortal self become like, and invariably act in the manner of, the eternal gods (5.105).

Diodotus had indeed indicated as much when he spoke of the unreasonable magnification cities and political individuals are susceptible of (3.45.6). What he ultimately meant by this becomes more apparent once one looks to Thucydides' "Archaeology," for there the latter makes his case as to why the Peloponnesian War was greater than the Trojan War. What that case in effect amounted to was his belittling the exaggerations of Homer (1.10-11). Perhaps the greatest exaggeration by the latter, however, is left unstated by Thucydides and only comes to light when one compares *The Peloponnesian War* with the *Iliad*. Whereas the presence of the gods abounds in the latter book, in Thucydides' they are only talked about. Diodotus, the "Gift of the gods," silently concurs with Thucydides' assessment concerning such exaggerations to the extent that he, who is named as such, never mentions the gods at all. One is thus left to infer that they too are delusory products of the passions, of hope and *eros*, which tempt men to mistakenly magnify the importance and end of their actions. But that these misguided actions find their fullest expression in the desire to try to live up to the image of these gods—particularly those that Homer brought to light and that influenced

all of Hellas certainly up to Thucydides' own day—suggests that Athens' attempt for immortality most clearly represents man's delusional nature.

It would seem that it was by having such an insight that Diodotus appeared only once in political life. To the extent that this is so, one is compelled to reassess his explicit statement concerning communities and the stakes that they play for as being the greatest (3.45.6). What further gives justification to calling into question this particular claim of his is, of course, his earlier stated confession before the Athenian assembly where he told the people he had to, and so was about to, lie to them (3.43.3). His disappearance from active political life would thus seem to follow from his understanding of human nature and to thereby suggest that the private life he lived was more fulfilling than any other. He thus seems to have been placating the Athenians when implying their concerns were actually the greatest.

What's more, Thucydides' himself seems to share with Diodotus the preference for the private over the public life. But of course, Thucydides was, unlike Diodotus, a political man *exiled* from his own country (4.105-107, 5.26.5). Even so, this politically shameful turn of events nevertheless afforded him the leisurely opportunity to "observe affairs more closely." Yet this is all but to admit that it was only through leisure that Thucydides could offer his readers a possession for all times (1.22.4). It would thus seem that both Diodotus and Thucydides, notwithstanding the different occasions that turned each of them to living their own, private lives, nevertheless share with each other an ultimate preference for the contemplative over the political life (this becomes all the clearer with respect to Diodotus once one realizes the importance of the relation between wisdom and law that he raised in his own speech). Accordingly, insofar as the ultimate desire of the political community seems to find its expression in Pericles, and to the extent that that desire is still left wanting and confused, it would seem that the eternity longed for by individuals and their communities can only find adequate expression and satisfaction in contemplating and understanding the unchanging nature of man. In this way, then, Diodotus and Thucydides as political beings who returned to "private" life mirror each other by tacitly consenting to this shared, philosophic view (see Addendum 8).

For these reasons, it would seem that both of these men can be said to have been capable of understanding desire prior to its grasping hold of their minds and thus deluding them: society, one might say Athens or Sparta, could not simply charm them into the service of magnification. They thus show themselves to be aware of the essential limitations of human life

and desire and thereby show that they are also aware of the philosophically modest manner and extent by which that life and desire can be fulfilled.

But that neither of these men openly spoke of any of this suggests that the misunderstood desire Diodotus spoke of is not simply dangerous, as he had indeed said it was, but also politically salutary. For it was only through the Periclean understanding of desire that Athens was able to become a great empire and thus cultivate men who could actually *supersede* her: the highest city brought forth even higher men. Accordingly, Diodotus' claim that citizens would reject good advice if by chance the adviser was suspected of endorsing a proposal that might benefit himself most of all shows that his countrymen were not simply wrong in suspecting their own advisers, including Diodotus. In the most important respect, then, he remained silent about his own, higher good. (Such reticence, however, does not in anyway preclude his benefiting his fellow citizens while also leaving for himself the highest good known to man. When he was able to, Diodotus stepped forth and offered a politically advantageous and just proposal for his city to follow. This is mirrored by Thucydides giving us his book.)

Yet one must immediately add that Diodotus' assertion that the city needs to be lied to even when one is trying to benefit it does not mean that he did so just to temper Athens' sometimes immoderately harsh policies so as to maintain the necessary means for preserving a philosophic life. After all, such a need equally applies to those who are wholeheartedly devoted to being the best statesmen they can possibly be, both for their own sake and for the sake of the wellbeing of their city. To see how and why this is so, one must move beyond Diodotus' speech to Thucydides' narrative of the story of Harmodius and Aristogiton. That story shows both how Alcibiades related to his Athens and how Thucydides is in full agreement with Diodotus not only in favoring the philosophic over the political life, but also in teaching statesmen how to benefit political life.

#### HARMODIUS AND ARISTOGEITON

Thucydides' narrative of the Harmodius and Aristogiton story is preceded by its adumbration which occurs five books earlier than the narrative itself. All the way back in Book One, Thucydides had made mention of the uncritical manner by which most men deal with their traditions and contemporary history (1.20). In attempting to illustrate some of the pains he had gone through so as to uncover the truths present within his book, Thucydides outlines the mistaken Athenian belief concerning the story of

these two men. It was generally believed that Harmodius and Aristogeiton were responsible for the usurpation and killing of the Athenian tyrant Hipparchus. Yet Thucydides briefly indicates that that belief was unfounded. Hipparchus was merely the brother of the tyrant Hippias.

But as quickly as this story comes, it goes. Thucydides' reader will have to wait until Book Six before it is treated again and told in full. One is consequently compelled to ask why this is so. Whatever the reasons for this may be, the consummation of the story follows on the recall of Alcibiades from Sicily (6.53). This seems fitting insofar as the mass of the people entertained the notion that Alcibiades longed to become a tyrant himself. His unmistakable superiority and the frankness with which he expressed it frightened the people and seemed to compel them into ruining Athens through their distrust of him (6.15.4). But as Thucydides makes clear, "in itself" his public conduct in no way cut across or against the public good. Indeed, nothing more than his given ability could have sensibly left anyone wanting, as he was remarkably capable of giving the Athenian people (and himself) exactly what was desired (see Addendum 9).

Even so, personal squabbles amongst the Athenians who vied for leadership (after the death of Pericles) encouraged such fears in the people (2.65.10-12, 6.12.2, 6.15.4, 6.28.2, 6.53.2). Thucydides thus indicates that the ruin of Athens had to do with the concern for individual success or advancement of her would-be leaders, the fear of such advancement in the eyes of the many, and Alcibiades' naïve frankness in openly showing his superiority (6.15.4). Both the leading politicians and the people were thus like-minded in their fear of him, for neither wanted anyone to be placed above themselves. (That is to say, the only way a *demagogue* could properly advance himself depended on his success with and supposed equality to the people.)

These sorrowful admissions concerning Athenian ineptitudes were exactly what Diodotus had in mind when he stated that a competent and prudent adviser must lie to the public so that it will adopt and enact his prudent advice. For the nature of the many is such that they are essentially jealous and so primarily concerned, not with what is politically good as such, that is, the common good, but with maintaining an at least equal balance in the distribution of benefits. Accordingly, a clearly beneficial proposition would be rejected out of spite if perchance it was suspected that the one advancing the proposal would somehow obtain an additional benefit that superseded one's own. Insofar as this is so, Diodotus' speech can be said

to prepare us for Alcibiades' recall, which in turn prepares us for the story of Harmodius and Aristogeiton.

In relating that story in full, Thucydides tells us that the people had heard of the harshness surrounding the rule of Pisistratus and his sons, Hippias and Hipparchus. Consequently, they believed tyranny was something to be condemned and avoided at all costs; or that Alcibiades was manifestly a threat to the wellbeing of Athens and so surely had to be guarded against insofar as he presumably had a tyrannical disposition (6.53.3). Yet we are subsequently informed by Thucydides, as distinct from the people or "the vulgar" who do not take pains to find out the truth of such matters, that Pisistratus and his lineage had not generally been harsh in their rule. In fact, they had cultivated wisdom and virtue, and the city had been splendidly adorned during their reign (6.54.5). It was only after the attempt on and execution of Hipparchus by Aristogeiton and Harmodius that fear compelled Hippias, the true tyrant, to act in the manner that the people seemed to have assumed all tyrants had acted and would act (6.59.1-2). Yet what had compelled all of this, or what drove these two in their attempt against the tyranny, thus provoking the ensuing harshness of it, was not a revolution inspired by freedom that longed to break the yoke of oppression so as to install a democratic regime like the one Athens had at the time of Alcibiades' recall. No—it was primarily Aristogeiton's jealousy in regard to his lover Harmodius and the advances the tyrant's brother, Hipparchus, had made toward him. Thus it was through jealousy that the democratic Athens of Alcibiades' time was incidentally prepared. However, no matter how incidental that preparation was, Aristogeiton's motivation for acting as he did and the character of the later democratic Athens were one and the same. Both were more concerned with their own satisfaction and limiting the advancement of another's, even if that meant worsening their lot and the city's wellbeing along with it.

Eros, Socrates tells us, is the Tyrant incarnate (Plato 1968, 573). Diodotus had indicated as much when he had spoken of the desire of the people to not be overcome in any regard by others. As matters have thus far come to light, Aristogeiton's proto-democratic character would seem to confirm this very suggestion. Yet all of this cuts against the fundamental principles of a democracy as such. One is thus left wondering whether democracies are incapable of understanding their true nature or where their principles actually come from. This contention appears to be borne out insofar as the Athenian misperception concerning the "tyrannicide" seems to correspond to the lie the city needs to be told. That correspondence begins



to reveal itself once the general Athenian inaccuracy concerning her own tyrants and history is understood to stem from the *demos*' desire to justify the Athenian democracy against the "cruel" despotism of yesteryear. Yet that justification has since come to light as mere, though unknowing, pretense: the people are inherently jealous of those who have more, just as was Aristogeiton. And it was precisely tyrannical jealousy which not only endangered both conspirators and their fellow citizens, but also the Athenians who were afraid of and so recalled the competent and yet hubristic Alcibiades. Democratic people thus deceive themselves concerning the matter of equality or their democratic institutions as being more salutary and just than they really are. This seems to be why Diodotus covered over the issue of justice in regard to Mytilene and instead spoke of expediency.

By so doing, he was able to deceive in his own manner precisely because he knew what kind of lies the people depend on. Following on all that has been said, it would thus seem that the *demos*—but therewith any *demos* whatsoever, including the few who are equal amongst themselves—are most hostile to the truth concerning their own longings in two important respects. That is, the Athenians were incapable of both following Diodotus' depreciation of political greatness and of learning of the dangers of their hypocrisy that he had helped expose. Accordingly, his frank admission about the nature of the city and man was not instructive to the city but only to Thucydides' reader. This is confirmed by the fact that they did not seem to understand that he was lying to them. They were consequently unable to learn from his admission and better themselves. In other words, they still went on to recall Alcibiades for reasons that go to the heart of their misperceptions concerning the harshness of tyrannies, their own tyrannical ambitions. (That they followed his advice at all with respect to Mytilene seems to have more to do with his giving voice to what they already felt within themselves and so were willing to admit. In other words, the help he could offer was heavily qualified by its being bound to a particular affair.)

The story of Harmodius and Aristogeiton can thus be understood as having intended to show that the Athenians lacked self-knowledge (accordingly, the earlier temptation to assert Athens' superior self-knowledge with respect to Sparta's must now be mitigated). Yet in order to see this we had to first familiarize ourselves with the Athenian character through people such as Diodotus, Alcibiades, and the responses to them by other fellow Athenians (including Thucydides' comments concerning each) during the war. Thus only after having read from Book One to Book Six are we properly

prepared to understand what the Athenians could not: that they did not understand themselves. Thucydides beautifully brings this out during his narrative of the Sicilian campaign where the Athenians were fighting unsuccessfully against the Syracuseans. It was said that they were for the first time during the war fighting against a city like themselves, both in character and constitution. Yet it was just this sameness between the two regimes that made the fighting difficult for the Athenians. They were perplexed and driven into bewilderment (7.55). Athens, then, did not and could not understand the enemy because she could not understand herself. But even more than this, it would seem that the story of Harmodius and Aristogeiton suggests that, had Alcibiades become tyrant, he may have been able to save the people and thus his country by re-instilling the wisdom that was coeval with Hippias' early tyranny (though this seems to only be a qualified preference of Thucydides' for tyranny which is based on the circumstances of the Sicilian expedition; see 1.17).

For reasons such as these, both Diodotus and Thucydides can be understood to not only point beyond the merely political, they also show how the city can be practically and so politically helped. They thereby address two different audiences at once, those who are either politically inclined like Alcibiades but wish to avoid his failures, and those who are philosophically inclined like themselves. Their political involvement is thus salutary and profound.

#### ADDENDA

1. To the extent that Thucydides' intention is to offer knowledge of the human condition, perhaps one must concede that his book is not simply philosophical, but is of political philosophy. With respect to philosophy, one may say that, inasmuch as man is that special being who is open to the whole (being), he alone can philosophize about it, for of all beings he is like it inasmuch as he can follow in thought the order or nature of that which is. Yet the pursuit of such knowledge presupposes that he, insofar as he is also the only creature capable of self-deception, must come to know his own nature first and foremost. Political philosophy is thus of the greatest philosophical importance.

2. For example, Gerald M. Mara's "Thucydides and Plato on Democracy and Trust" (2001), Leo Strauss's "The History of the Peloponnesian War" (1978), and Clifford Orwin's "Democracy and Trust" (2000) are all primarily interested in Diodotus' claim as only pertaining to democratic

regimes. One notable exception is David Bolotin's "Thucydides" (1987), which in this respect and others anticipates some of the claims I make in this paper, specifically as regards Diodotus and philosophy. I should also mention in this regard Christopher Bruell's essay "Thucydides' View of Athenian Imperialism" (1974), as he too is aware of the sweeping claims which Diodotus makes in his speech.

3. C. D. C. Reeve's interpretation of these events in his "Thucydides on Human Nature," does not seem to take this important fact into account. Likewise, Reeve's does not sufficiently deal with the envy or *pleonexia* that exists even amongst equals (as do both Diodotus and Thucydides), but instead relegates this animosity to the differing classes of rich and poor (and this even though Thucydides ultimately shows how this class division is less important than the similar individuals that make up the classes). And though he mentions that "power and wealth naturally attract some envy," he otherwise glosses this fact over and thereby the otherwise problematic relation between power and arrogance (1999, 438). In other words, not enough attention seems to be given to the fact that even justified power and its sound use might still be perceived as unjustified or arrogant and thus bring with them the unjust desire for revenge.

4. Peter J. Ahrensdorf's "The Fear of Death and the Longing for Immortality: Hobbes and Thucydides on Human Nature and the Problem of Anarchy" (2000) also examines but in a different manner the importance of the desire for immortality within Thucydides' narration.

5. A. Andrews, in his "The Mytilene Debate: Thucydides" openly states that this speech was certainly for the sake of showing Sparta's national character (1962, 71).

6. Indeed, she was slow to enter into it precisely because she first needed others to speak for her (1.70, but also 6.88.10, 6.90-93, 7.18.1, 7.19.1, 7.27.3-5, 7.28.1-2, 8.95.2). Her lack of speech is thus linked with her lack of "movement" or ambition so that she appears on the whole as "unnatural." Speech, then, brings to light and belongs with ambition, so that one can speak of the loquacious and ambitious Athenians. In this regard, Athens is more natural than Sparta and so more important in Thucydides' narrative.

7. Martin Ostwald, in his philological exegesis of the text, notes how the compulsion which led to war is not directly attributed to the Spartan fear of Athens, as most translations tend to suggest, for the use of *ananke* lacks a direct object. Accordingly, he concludes that Thucydides'

*ananke* applies not only to Sparta's fear, but also to Athens' growth (1988, 3-5). Thus, both parties were compelled into war by each other.

8. That Thucydides was content to simply observe affairs and no longer actively partake in them comes to light when one considers others who had been run out of Athens and yet longed for and so reentered political life: namely Themistocles, Hippias, and Alcibiades. It thus seems that only Thucydides was content to go to others simply for the sake of "seeing." Both Thomas Hobbes (1989, 571-75) and David Bolotin (1987, 30-31) make a similar claim to mine. To avoid unnecessary confusion, however, it must be added that this private life of contemplation is based on an understanding of the political nature of man and so cannot simply be apolitical. In this respect, Thucydides and Diodotus ultimately point to a common theme found elsewhere in the classical tradition (e.g., Plato's *Apology*, 32-33, and *Gorgias*, 521d, the difference between Xenophon's Socratic and non-Socratic writings, and Aristotle's *Politics*, 1255b20 and 1324a). As to Thucydides' relation to philosophical thought in general, particularly with respect to the Sophists, see Arlene Saxonhouse's "Nature and Convention in Thucydides' *History*" (1978, 461-87).

9. Plutarch points to the difficulty of Alcibiades' relation to Athens by stating that she both needed him but couldn't stomach him (1986, xxii.5 and xxvii-xxxviii.) For two other extended and direct treatments of this relation, one may consult Steven Forde's *The Ambition to Rule* (1989) and Robert Faulkner's *The Case for Greatness* (2007, 58-126.)

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## Postscript to "A Report on Leo Strauss's Course on Giambattista Vico"

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I wrote a report published in the last edition of *Interpretation* on the transcript of Leo Strauss's course on Vico, taught in the autumn quarter of 1963, at the University of Chicago. I noted that the transcript suffers lacunae and that Lectures 8, 10, and 16 are missing altogether. I did not realize that my own copy of the transcript was missing a seventeenth lecture, one that I have since acquired.

Better information on these transcripts should be available in the future: the tapes and transcripts of Strauss's courses are being put into digital format at the new Leo Strauss Center at the University of Chicago. For further details, see <http://chronicle.uchicago.edu/090402/strauss.shtml> (accessed April 3, 2009) and <http://leostrausscenter.uchicago.edu/> (accessed April 3, 2009).

The transcript of the seventeenth lecture is the last of the course, is a page or two shorter than average, and ends without any concluding statement, either of that class or of the course as a whole. It considers selected paragraphs numbered between 1039 and 1083 of the *New Science of Giambattista Vico*, and hence the transcript does not include consideration of the concluding section of this work, paragraphs 1097-1112, which would have offered an occasion for more synoptic comments. For this and other reasons the last class confirms the impression left by the other lectures that Strauss understood this course to be a preliminary and wide-ranging investigation, not a conclusive study. The transcript of class 17 does not make any corrections of points made in previous classes or announce any substantial development of prior discussions, though of course it does refer to some

topics that were also discussed in prior classes. Chief among these are Vico's account of the barbarism or even bestiality of early times, the return of barbarism in the Middle Ages, and the question of how Vico understands divine providence. Newer points include Vico's views that the emergence of philosophy depended especially on legislation and democracy; that his schema of the usual succession of the ages did not hold in Assyria, Egypt, or the Middle Ages, no one of which had a democratic age; and that—perhaps surprisingly—less is known about the later medieval barbarism than about its predecessor. The Middle Ages had chroniclers but no Thucydides or Aristotle.



**Addenda and Corrigenda:**  
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p. 10, n. 31, l. 10:                    90                    *should appear as*                    91

p. 27 (additional comment): On Leo Weinstein's mimeographed copy of the "Restatement (1950)" typescript, which appears to stem from the same stencil as Joseph Cropsey's and Laurence Berns', the following notation, in Weinstein's hand, occurs at the top of the first page: "Corrected version 1954"—This notation suggests that the handwritten additions (included in the published versions) which appear on the series of mimeographed copies are contemporary with the publication of the French translation. (I thank Stuart Warner, Chicago, for having pointed out this document to me.)

p. 32, l. 10 (additional note): *OT* 1963: no comma after "hand"

p. 43: note 137 should be removed.

p. 56, l. 6 (additional note): *JC*: sceptic

p. 80, l. 8:                                496 ff.                                495 f.

p. 91: the three lines in smaller size above the date should appear on the right of the page.

p. 93, l. 3:                                17.XII.1933                                17.XII.1932

p. 93, correction to p. 222 (December 17, 1932):

17, Square Grangé

Paris (13e), 17.XII.32

7 Square Grangé

Paris (13e), 17.XII.1932

p. 93, correction to p. 222, l. 2: “have the” should appear in the second column, and “have now the” in the third column.

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