

Interpretation

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On Higher Education and the Crisis of Our Time: A Lecture by Leo Strauss

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EDITORIAL PREFACE

On March 22, 1961, Leo Strauss delivered “On Higher Education and the Crisis of Our Time” as the Spring Convocation address at San Francisco State College.¹ With nine hundred people in attendance in the College’s main auditorium, it was, as Strauss put it three days later in a letter to a colleague, “my first lecture to a mass audience.”²

The lecture—while unusually popular or plain-spoken in character—is closely related to other writings by Strauss from the same period: it foreshadows, in particular, the introductory remarks of *The City and Man* (1964) and the twin lectures “The Crisis of Our Time” and “The Crisis of Political

¹ The lecture was announced in the college’s newsletter *Faculty Footnotes: Weekly Bulletin of Information* 21, no. 23 (March 20, 1961), 1–2, as well as in the student newspaper the *Daily Gater* 79, no. 28 (March 22, 1961), 1. A report by T. Link and W. Espaldon was published the next day: “Strauss: ‘Dogma Worse than Death,’” *Daily Gater* 79, no. 29 (March 23, 1961), 1. The editors gratefully acknowledge the help of Meredith Eliassen, Special Collections Librarian at SFSU’s Historic Collections and University Archives in locating this material.

² Leo Strauss’s unpublished letter to Joseph Cropsey, March 25, 1961, Leo Strauss Papers, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, uncatalogued.

Philosophy” (1964).³ The lecture also bears affinities with Strauss’s 1959 and 1960 lectures on liberal education, as well as his famous “Progress or Return?” lectures from 1952/1953. It is, however, the combination of themes—the manifold crises; the peculiar threat of Communism to the Western tradition; the difference between “liberal” and “higher” education; and, last but not least, “Jerusalem” and “Athens”—that makes the lecture we present here especially distinctive.⁴

While Strauss apparently did not make any plans to publish the lecture “On Higher Education and the Crisis of Our Time,” he did plan to incorporate it into a course with the title “Natural Right,” which he taught in the autumn quarter 1962 at the University of Chicago.⁵ The course transcript shows that Strauss did not simply recycle the manuscript of his lecture. Yet the starting-point remains “the progressive crisis of the modern world” and Strauss provides a similar explanation of the nature of this crisis: “In what does that crisis consist? We can say that the West, the noncommunist West, has lost a certainty which gave it guidance for centuries. The West has lost in our time the certainty of progress. The belief that the fundamental project which guided the West constitutes a progress beyond all earlier possibilities; to mention only one very innocent example: Zen Buddhism.”⁶

³ See Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), 1–12, and Harold J. Spaeth, ed., *The Predicament of Modern Politics* (Detroit: University of Detroit Press, 1964), 41–54 and 91–103; the twin lectures were published as a consolidated essay during Strauss’s lifetime in *The Post-Behavioral Era: Perspectives on Political Science*, ed. George J. Graham Jr. and George W. Carey (New York: David McKay, 1972), 217–42.

⁴ See the first two chapters of Leo Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968); the “Progress or Return?” lecture series—which Strauss delivered at Hillel House in Chicago in 1952 and at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles in 1953—has been posthumously published in at least five venues, though never authoritatively; cf. Hilail Gildin, ed., *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays by Leo Strauss* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 249–310. On the theme of the lecture presented here see also the end of Strauss’s “Three Waves of Modernity,” in *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, 81–98.

⁵ On the envelope that contains the manuscript, Leo Strauss wrote: “S F State College Convocation Address 22.3.1961 | on Higher Education and the Crisis of our time | to be used in Natural Right course.” The envelope and the manuscript are to be found in the Leo Strauss Papers (Series II, Sub-series 1, Box 7, Folder 7). A transcript of the 1962 “Natural Right” course (ed. Svetozar Y. Minkov) can be found on the Leo Strauss Center website: [https://wslamp70.s3.amazonaws.com/leostrauss/pdf/Natural+Right+\(1962\).1.pdf](https://wslamp70.s3.amazonaws.com/leostrauss/pdf/Natural+Right+(1962).1.pdf). “Basic Principles of Classical Political Philosophy (Aristotle),” the course Strauss taught in the autumn quarter 1961, also takes up similar issues. For the transcript (ed. M. Richard Zinman), see the Leo Strauss Center website: [https://wslamp70.s3.amazonaws.com/leostrauss/pdf/Basic+Principles+\(1961\).pdf](https://wslamp70.s3.amazonaws.com/leostrauss/pdf/Basic+Principles+(1961).pdf).

⁶ Strauss, “Natural Right” (1962), 1. See also 2 and 65.

Our edition of “On Higher Education and the Crisis of Our Time”—which is published here with the permission of Jenny Strauss Clay, who retains her rights to the material—is based on Strauss’s handwritten manuscript which, according to his own testimony, is “not of perfect readability.”⁷ In preparing the following edition, we have not tried to smooth out the rough edges of the manuscript and have kept our editorial revisions (indicated by square brackets) to an absolute minimum. Strauss’s sometimes idiosyncratic abbreviations are explained upon their first occurrence, and the paragraph headings, which Strauss wrote in the left-hand margins, are set in small capitals.

One peculiar feature of the lecture is its abrupt or unceremonious opening. Perhaps in an attempt to conform to the event’s tight schedule—“the time was strictly limited to the minute”⁸—Strauss seems to have made last-minute cuts to the beginning of his manuscript. Likely as a result, the first page of the manuscript is missing and the top two-thirds of the second page are struck through. This crossed-out section reads as follows.

By what I said I do not mean that no society can be healthy unless it is dedicated to a universal purpose, to a purpose in which all men can be united: a society can be tribal and yet healthy. Yet a society which is accustomed to think in terms of universal purpose, cannot lose faith in that universal purpose without becoming completely disoriented. And we surely find such a universal purpose in our immediate past—e.g. in certain official statements made during the 2nd World War and after. These statements merely reproduce in telescoped form a vision which has been operative for some centuries, the modern centuries. In the center of that vision stands the figure of Science, modern science. This modern science was to be no longer, like the old science, contemplative and proud, but active and charitable; it was to be in the service of the relief of man’s estate; it was to enable man to become the master and owner of nature through the intellectual conquest of nature; by bringing about universal plenty, it was to make it possible that everyone could get his share in all the advantages of society; it was to bring about the just society, a universal society of free and equal men and women, a society in which each can develop all his faculties to the full in such a way that the development of each will be in perfect harmony with—nay, will require—the development of everyone else.

⁷ Strauss to Cropsey, March 25, 1961.

⁸ Ibid.

AGREEMENT BETWEEN WEST AND COMMUNISM RE [REGARDING] THE
END—BUT NOT RE: MEANS—I.E. RE MORALITY, OR THE POWER OF EVIL.

It cannot be denied that in respect of this vision, of this ultimate purpose, there is agreement between the West and Communism, as distinguished from Fascism. This agreement may be said to have been the basis of the 2nd World War Alliance. The fundamental disagreement between the West and Communism seems to concern only the means to the end mentioned. The Communists teach in effect that the end justifies any means. The end may be said to be the common good of the whole human race: no end can be more sacred than that. What better anchor for our choices of means can be found than the sacred end? Whatever contributes to it, partakes of its sacredness and is therefore itself sacred; whatever hinders its attainment, verges on the diabolical. The murder of Lumumba was, in the words of Fidel Castro, a reprehensible murder—which implies that there can be irreprehensible murders like the murder of Nagy in Hungary. The fundamental disagreement between the West and Communism concerns, to repeat, the means. But this is to say that the fundamental disagreement concerns morality. We hold that not only the end but also the means must be sacred and that the sacredness of the end does not guarantee the sacredness of the means. In other words, the West believes that no social improvement of any kind—not even the establishment of a world-society in which every human being, merely because he is a human being, enjoys all the advantages of that most highly developed society—can eradicate the evil in man: as long as there will be men, there will be people who are filled with malice, envy and hatred. Therefore we believe that there can never be a stateless society, a society which does not need coercion or punishment. In particular, we are not certain whether the dictatorship of the proletariat will not transform itself into (or remain as long as it lasts) the iron rule of a tyrant for whom the political convenience of the moment is not more important than simple justice. It thus becomes necessary for us to think about morality, about good and evil. What help do we get regarding the knowledge of good and evil from contemporary Western thought, from that Western thought which is peculiar to our age? In answering that question, we shall discover the nature of the crisis of our time and therewith the task of higher education in our time.

Leo Strauss: On Higher Education and the Crisis of Our Time

PRESENT WESTERN MORALITY: FACTS ≠ VALUES.

That Western thought which is peculiar to our age, is ruled by 2 powers: Science and History. Let us see how morality fares under the rule of these powers. Our science, when applied to human affairs, becomes SS [social science]. SS is guided by the distinction between facts and values, or between factual judgments and value judgments. This distinction means that only factual judgments can be objective, objectively true, whereas value judgments are necessarily subjective. We can indeed know which means are conducive to which ends, but it is not possible to prefer on rational grounds any attainable end to any other (say, to the destruction of the majority of humans). This means that science or reason has increased unbelievably and is still increasing unbelievably man's power; but reason is unable to tell him anything relevant as regards the use of that power. Reason is ultimately blind. It is obvious that men thus circumstanced are in a crisis—in the deepest crisis one could imagine. In their tribal past, men received guidance from venerable traditions—traditions which were believed to be of divine origin. Those beliefs, those venerations have been destroyed by science—by a science which originally promised to enable us to define rationally, i.e. clearly and distinctly, the true ends of man. But now, at least science or reason has proved to be impotent regarding the knowledge of ends. Hence no one of us has anything to turn to for his guidance except his likes or dislikes—his purely subjective preferences or values. We can no longer will in a responsible manner: we are reduced to a state of aimless drifting. (This aimlessness regarding action is bound to affect SS itself. SS may possess objective criteria of exactness; it necessarily lacks objective criteria of relevance, for relevance depends on values and values are merely subjective.) Above all, as regards means, i.e. the matter with which morality is primarily concerned, SS may be able to distinguish between expedient and inexpedient means; it does not distinguish between decent and indecent means, for this latter distinction implies value-judgments.

BUT MERELY ACADEMIC

Someone might object by saying that the situation in the SS is a purely academic affair and has nothing to do with the crisis of our time. I must

therefore show that the fact-value distinction as underlying present-day SS reflects a disorder affecting our society as a whole.

QUERELLE: VIRTUE AS THE CORE OF HAPPINESS ≠ VIRTUE AS A MEANS FOR HAPPINESS

Our science started its career in the 17th century with the assumption that the only thing needed was the increase of man's power through the conquest of nature; it had no doubts as to the ends for which this power was to be used; there was nothing subjective about those ends; those ends seemed to be obvious: they are men's natural ends—such as health, a long life, a maximum of pleasures and a minimum of pains etc. The society in which these ends are pursued consistently and wholeheartedly, is the good society, and SS was to teach how this good society could be established, preserved and improved. This over-all view arose in reaction to an earlier view, the traditional view, which can be described briefly as follows. Man has indeed natural, non-arbitrary ends; those ends are meant by the term “happiness,” the core of which is human excellence or virtue; the good society is the society dedicated to the pursuit of human excellence and must therefore be ruled by men who are themselves thoroughly dedicated to that end; these men are the perfect gentlemen. One becomes a gentleman through education, through liberal education. Liberal education is meant, above all, to form a man's character and his taste. Liberal education is the highest duty of the good society. Whether there ever was such a good society in the full sense of the term, was not so important as the consideration that without a clear and fairly detailed picture of the good society it is not possible to diagnose and hence to remedy the defects of actual societies. That traditional view was attacked on the ground that it was not realistic: if the good society was never actual, there must be something in the nature of things which prevents its actualization. The reason seemed to be obvious: the traditional view ascribed to virtue and to reason a power in social life which they manifestly do not possess. Passion cannot be countered by sweet reasonable persuasion or by exhortation, imploring or stern,—passion can be countered only by passion. We must take our bearings not by how men ought to live but how they do live; not by the ends which they ought to pursue but by the ends which all or most men do pursue. One may call these ends “happiness” provided one does not conceive of virtue as the core of happiness; if men strive for virtue at all, they strive for it as a means to happiness, i.e. for wealth, prestige and comfort. Virtue was traditionally understood as concern with the common good. If one denies the power of virtue, one can no longer regard the common good

as the intended outcome of conscious concern with the common good, but only as the unintended outcome of conscious concern with one's own or one's group selfish interest. This view may take one of these two opposite forms: the common good, the good society will necessarily come into being either if each is concerned only with his private profit (free enterprise) or if each class is concerned only with its victory over the opposed class (Communism).

EVERYONE THE JUDGE

Hitherto we have observed that the decisive step taken at the beginning of the modern era was a change in the understanding of happiness: the happiness whose core is virtue, was replaced by happiness to which virtue is only a means. Now it appears that the happiness to which virtue is only a means, is not the same for all—in fact [it] differs more or less from individual to individual and even for individuals at different times: happiness proves to be subjective. Therefore, happiness cannot be a common end; it cannot be the end of society. Yet what is true of happiness, is not true of the conditions of happiness. In fact there are certain conditions which must be fulfilled regardless of what one understands by happiness. These conditions are: life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness. These conditions are therefore the fundamental rights, the rights of man as man. Of these 3 rights, the right to life, the right to self-preservation is the most fundamental. If everyone has by nature the right to preserve himself, he must have the right to everything necessary for his self-preservation, to every necessary means to his self-preservation. At this point the question arises: who is to be the judge as to which means are necessary for a man's self-preservation? The traditional answer was: the man of practical wisdom or virtue is the natural judge; a fool might regard things fatal to his self-preservation as necessary for his self-preservation. The modern answer was to the opposite effect for the following reason: the man of practical wisdom or virtue may be a better judge of what is conducive to the fool's self-preservation—but he is surely much less interested in the fool's self-preservation than the fool himself. Therefore, if everyone's right to self-preservation is to be assured, everyone must be the judge as to the means for his self-preservation or as to what constitutes his own interest,—this judgment must be, in the last analysis, uncontrolled; it must not make any difference whether the individual's judgment is well-considered or raw: the raw judgments must have the same status as the well-considered ones. Now, if everyone is the sovereign judge of his interest, conflict, war of everyone with everyone is inevitable—i.e. a state of things which is fatal to the self-preservation of each. Self-preservation requires in all cases peace and hence

habits of peace, i.e. certain virtues. But these habits will not be effective, they will not even be developed, if there is no guarantee that their practice is conducive to self-preservation. This guarantee can be supplied only by a strong government which keeps the peace by means of coercion. I.e.: what is most important is not any virtue but institutions with teeth in them. To solve the human problem as a social problem, it is not necessary, as the ancients thought, that man, or some men, become something like angels: that problem is soluble even in a nation of devils, provided they have sense, i.e. provided they devise, or have devised for them, the right kind of institutions which compel every devil to act peaceably. Reason needs then not to be located in the individuals but in the institutions.

(HAPPINESS ≠ COMFORTABLE SELF-PRESERVATION—FOR: THERE MUST BE LEFT ROOM FOR θεωρία [THEORY/CONTEMPLATION] AS A) PREFERENCE OF SOME INDIVIDUALS (≠ NATURAL END) B) SCIENTIA PROPTER POTENTIAM [SCIENCE FOR THE SAKE OF POWER] CANNOT BE THE τέλος [END/GOAL/PURPOSE])⁹

The first solution which suggested itself on this basis, was absolute gov't [government], especially in the form of the modern absolute monarchy. This absolute government was to have the function or the duty to keep peace and to take care of the well-being of the subjects. In order to take care properly of the well-being of the subjects, the absolute gov't has to be enlightened: enlightened despotism which attempts to make its subjects happy by guaranteeing to them not only self-preservation but comfortable self-preservation—a despotism which listens to the philosopher-scientists who are concerned with making discoveries and inventions conducive to the relief of man's estate. The standard guiding enlightened despotism—due care for comfortable self-preservation (health, food, clothing, lodgings etc.)—is objective. But one must not forget that a man may live comfortably and yet be unhappy: comfortable self-preservation is not happiness. Or one may say that the comfortable self-preservation of each constitutes public happiness in contradistinction to happiness proper, i.e., private happiness. In order to convince his subjects of the fact that comfortable self-preservation in this world is more important than salvation in the next, i.e., than religious orthodoxy which in one way or another limits the prince's sovereignty, enlightened despotism must transform itself into enlightening despotism. But if the subjects become themselves enlightened, there is no longer any reason why they should be the subjects of a despot, however enlightened: we must demand self-government

⁹ On a verso page, Leo Strauss adds: "public happiness ≠ private happiness—but: private happiness = virtuous activity = working for the public happiness = developing one's faculties."

for an enlightened people which as a people is dedicated to comfortable self-preservation, which guarantees to everyone the rights of man and which in its public policies is guided by concern with public welfare—we must demand a liberal democracy.

We are all familiar with this concept of the good society which is still a rational concept, a concept based on the belief in the power of reason. Therefore it is not in agreement with the basic premise of the modern developments and must hence be modified so as to be brought into line with that basic premise. Let us first reconsider the first stage: the absolute monarchy which is enlightened and dedicated to enlightenment. Now there is a great difference between its quality of being absolute and its quality of being enlightened: its being absolute government is indispensable for keeping the peace among subjects, and the discharge of this function is obviously in the interest, even in the narrowly conceived interest, of the government; the discharge of this function is therefore practically automatic. Entirely different is the status of its being enlightened: its being enlightened is a mere desideration, the object of a pious hope; there is not, and there cannot be, an institutional or self-enforcing guarantee for it. We cannot be certain then that our absolute monarch will be enlightened; we can only be certain that there will be an absolute monarch. We are thus confronted by an absolute monarch who might well act tyrannically without having anything to fear. To avoid this danger, we must limit the government—we must make it responsible to the governed. To rush to the end of the road: the government must be elective, it must be elected in elections in which every adult citizen can participate; there must be an independent judiciary or separation of powers in general; no man must be subject to laws in the making of which he did not have a share through his representative. We may say that liberal democracy is the best institutional protection ever devised against tyranny, even against the tyranny of the majority. Nevertheless, all these institutions do not give a guarantee that the public powers will be used in the public interest, that the right of each will be scrupulously respected by the government and the governed alike and that public policy will in fact be dedicated to the public welfare. The good working of liberal democracy requires that the government and the governed be filled with public spirit, with the eternal vigilance which is the price of liberty. Now just as in the case of absolute monarchy there was a guarantee for its being absolute but no guarantee for its being enlightened, so in the case of liberal democracy there is a guarantee for certain procedures but there is no guarantee, there is not even a provision, that the procedure is applied in the right spirit. Liberal democracy “works,” i.e. it survives, without all its

members being public-spirited: there is electoral apathy precisely balanced by fits of mass hysteria; there is no self-gov't strictly speaking but government by so-called élites.

There is then a contrast between liberal democracy living up to its spirit and liberal democracy reduced to a procedure. If we pursue this contrast back to its principle, we discover the contrast between a true, objective public interest of a free society which is identical with the true interest of the individuals comprising it, not the individual's uncontrolled or raw judgments as to his interests or his preferences. Now, the procedures or institutions suffice for taking care of individual preferences but not for taking care of the public interest of the free societies. Whether the public interest is properly taken care of, depends on the accident whether men of necessary intelligence, courage to propose unpopular measures, willingness to sacrifice, and vision are elected to the highest offices by a large majority which cannot be expected to possess those virtues. This accident is not excluded but it is surely not given a greater chance than its opposite—as is shown for instance by the very institution of the so-called public opinion polls which are in fact polls of the raw judgments of individuals and which inevitably claim to give directions to the government. The individuals' raw judgments are, not controlled, but only limited or checked by other individuals' raw judgments regarding their interests. In brief, if we abstract from the practice of liberal democracy its operative notion of the good society, we are likely to arrive at this result: whereas according to the original notion, the good society was characterized by dedication to liberal education, the good society seems now to tend to be characterized by institutions which are devised to cater as much as possible to the individuals' raw judgments or whims—by institutions which come as close as possible to being institutions without teeth in them. Here, it seems to me, is the most massive manifestation of the crisis of the West, or, which is the same thing, of the inner weakness of the West against the Communist threat: no private or subjective preferences merely as such, however widely shared, can have that appeal to the better part of man than almost any notion of the common good as an objective good can have. This state of things is reflected in the academic distinction between facts and values; for according to that distinction, all values, all preferences, possess equal dignity, or equal lack of dignity, since no value has any rational or objective good; values are no more than expressions of a man's non-rational likes or dislikes.

One could say that the respect for all preferences—whether it is the preference for charity or the preference for literally slitting other people's

throats—is only the decayed form of the respect for every conscientious preference: not mere likes or dislikes, but the verdicts of every conscience deserve the utmost respect. But what does this mean re [regarding] the premise of the distinction between facts and values, or between the Is and the Ought? According to that premise, there are no natural ends, for in natural ends there would be an identity of Is and Ought. The denial of natural ends is implicit in the notion of conquest of nature, as appears if that notion is thought through. To begin with, conquest of nature is indeed conquest of nature for the sake of man's natural ends. But if nature is understood as the object of conquest, man regards nature as his enemy; man starts somehow outside of nature: he is free. Yet he is at the same time a part of nature; he himself possesses a nature. Is then his nature not a limitation to his freedom? Let us assume that his freedom requires that he should live in a universal society of free and equal men; this freedom would be contradicted by his nature, if there were natural inequality among men: among the individuals, the sexes or the races—inequalities in respect of strength, beauty, intelligence and creativity. In that case, man's freedom would require that the conquest of nature be extended so as to become also conquest of human nature or that man push back progressively both extra-human nature and his own nature. The difficulty could be resolved most easily if what appears at first glance as natural inequalities were in fact not natural but acquired—and acquired under the pressure of more or less defective institutions. This means however that everything specifically human must be understood as acquired, or more precisely it is man's nature to be infinitely malleable. Because it is man's determinate nature to be indeterminate, man and his institutions are susceptible of infinite progress as well as infinite decline, or there is a natural harmony between man's nature and the requirements of freedom. But how do we know that freedom and the free society are the true ends of man? They cannot be natural ends because nothing specifically human is natural. If the free society is not a mere subjective preference nor a natural end, it is an ideal. Ideals are not natural ends because they are the products of creative acts and for the same reason they are not objects of mere desires, a desire as such manifestly not being a creative act. Yet if the free society is an ideal, there are of necessity other ideals: societies other than the free society may be the product of creative acts; no ideal is absolute or universally valid. This view comes to grief because it leads to contradictory consequences. On the one hand, if no ideal is absolute or universally valid, tolerance for all ideals is required. On the other hand, however, every ideal requires full, intransigent dedication and

the refusal to make compromises—hence intolerance to antagonistic ideals. How then can we find our bearings?

Once one denies natural ends, all human ends appear to one as the results of creative acts or, more generally, of acquisitions. I.e. one is compelled to understand human ends, not as natural, but historical. Here we meet History, the 2nd of the two powers which rule the contemporary Western mind. We call the thought which is ruled above all by Science, positivism, and the thought which is ruled above all by History, historicism. The historicist position can be described as follows: it is impossible to maintain the positivistic distinction between facts and values; all cognition, all understanding is evaluating; but the standards of evaluation are not natural, or coeval with man, but historical; our standards are the values of our society or of our tradition. It is difficult to choose between positivism and historicism. Historicism is fully aware of the fact that values or ideals as originating in creative acts differ radically from mere objects of desire, while positivism is fully aware of the fact that the values of a society or of a tradition are in no way binding on the individual or that the individual can transcend his society or his tradition. In other words, whereas positivism demands the abandonment of rational universalism, i.e. of universalism as grounded in reason, but permits us to be universalists emotionally, historicism must demand the abandonment of universalism as such. Historicism thus creates a peculiar difficulty, for our tradition claims to be more than just our tradition; it claims to be valid for all men. Given the weakness of present-day Western thought, we are indeed compelled to have recourse to our tradition but it is impossible that we shall embrace it as our tradition, as something quasi-tribal: we reject our tradition in the act of taking refuge with it, if we do not seek it as something meant to be for all mankind.

Our tradition is frequently called the Judeo-Christian tradition. But one must not forget its third element: the Greek element. Our tradition possesses 2 roots: the Judeo-Christian and the Greek. Our tradition speaks therefore with 2 tongues. For immediate practical purposes this does not cause any difficulty; for our tradition speaks with one voice against the Communism which denies everything cherished by our tradition. Nevertheless, we must not forget that our tradition consists of elements which are not only different from one another but even opposed to one another. It does make a difference whether one waits for the coming of Redemption as Jews do or whether one believes that the Redeemer has already come, as the Christians do. And it surely makes a difference whether one does not believe in Redemption, future

or past, at all, i.e. not even in the need or possibility of Redemption, as the Greek element in our tradition bids us to do. Indeed, no conflict seems to be deeper and broader than the age-old conflict between Jerusalem and Athens: the conflict between the spirit of obedient love for God as the father and the King and the spirit expressed in the saying "virtue is knowledge." This conflict is waged by each side in the certainty that its antagonist is venerable indeed but must subject itself to its opponent in order to become entirely salutary: philosophy which means to be the queen must become the handmaid of faith or faith which means to be the queen must become subject to philosophy. In this conflict neither side has ever been completely victorious. It is this conflict which has kept the West awake and which is the secret of the intellectual and spiritual vitality of the West: to be a Western man means to be kept in motion by the conflict between Jerusalem and Athens. This conflict has never been resolved: the West still has its great task before it: the possibilities of the West are not exhausted: there is no inner necessity for the decline of the West. In other words, if the secular conflict between Jerusalem and Athens has not been resolved, we are ignorant regarding the most important and highest of all themes. We can no longer claim to possess the highest truth. This realization goes much deeper than the caution or humility characteristic of science at its best. Science at its best regards all its results (including the theory of evolution) as provisional or hypothetical. Yet within science there is a tradition of methods and even of results however provisional; there is a tradition regarding the function and character of methods which determines in advance which further methods can possibly become legitimate in science. But in the discussion, in which the conflict between J and A goes on with unabated vigor, there are no benchmarks of any kind which relieve us of the responsibility of thinking entirely for ourselves. To return from the inadequacies of contemporary Western thought to our tradition means then: to learn, or to learn again, to think, i.e. to think about the most important of all themes. But one cannot learn to think except by thinking. Learning to think or thinking is higher education, nay, high education simply, as distinguished from a merely liberal education. If we learn to think in this sense, we can never become mere specialists, even if we dedicate our work to a very special part of a very special science or pursuit; for our thinking will affect everything we do. There will not be a moment in our life, as it were, in which we will not be certain of the dignity of man as the only earthly being which is capable of thinking.

But how can this thinking which never ceases to be questioning or doubting, tell us what we ought to do? I shall not repeat what I indicated

when speaking of the experience of thinking as the experience of man's dignity—the experience of man's dignity is bound to be effective in whatever we do in private or in public life. I shall merely note that there is a difference between the openness of our theoretical horizon and the inevitable narrowness of our practical horizon, i.e. of the horizon of action in our time. The key issue of our time—an issue which affects all issues, however domestic or private—is the Cold War. However little we know of the experience of thinking, we know enough in order to be able to take a rational and a firm stand in the Cold War: we know enough to reject with disgust the narrow dogmatism and fanaticism by which Communism stands or falls and which is destructive, not only of the freedom of public utterance, but of the freedom of thinking itself. We know enough to know and to resolve: no surrender. For we surely know, or can easily be brought to know, that death, even the death of the human race, is not the greatest evil: an ignoble life spent in enslavement to a thought-destroying dogma and in toadying to its despicable high priests would be worse than death.

Philosophy, Politics, and Rhetoric in Cicero's *On the Orator*

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Abstract: Cicero combines philosophy, on one hand, and politics and rhetoric, on the other, in his own life. Contrary to the claims of some recent scholars, however, he does not understand the three subjects to coexist in ultimate harmony. In Cicero's dialogue *On the Orator*, the main characters, Crassus and Antonius, discuss with their colleagues the contribution that philosophy can make to rhetoric. They begin by distorting philosophy to make it suitable for rhetoric and end by attempting to fuse philosophy with rhetoric. To regard Crassus, Antonius, or both as Cicero's mouthpiece—as numerous scholars do—is to misapprehend the teaching of the work because both men demonstrate a superficial understanding of philosophy that conflicts with the deeper appreciation shown by Cicero in other philosophical works. Cicero is bringing to the reader's attention the difficulties involved in combining the quest for wisdom with the pursuit of rhetorical excellence.

A number of scholars who consider Cicero's treatment of the relation between philosophy, on one hand, and politics and rhetoric, on the other, argue that he regards those things as ultimately coexisting in harmony. Jonathan Zarecki finds in Cicero's dialogue *On the Orator* (*De oratore*) "the juxtaposition and reconciliation of oratory and philosophy" that is "indicative of Cicero's thinking during this period about both his own life and the state of the Republic" as well as a precursor to his arguments in *On the Republic* and *On the Laws*.¹ According to Walter Nicgorski, when one of the main characters in *On the Orator*, Lucius Licinius Crassus, criticizes Socrates for separating wisdom from rhetoric, we see a reflection of Cicero's worry that "it will be thought that eloquence can be distinct from wisdom" (3.60–61;

¹ Jonathan Zarecki, *Cicero's Ideal Statesman in Theory and Practice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 63.

cf. 3.72, 107–8, 122).² Gary Remer claims, “For Cicero, rhetoric, politics, and philosophy are so interconnected that they are, or at least should be, a unity under the rubric ‘eloquence.’”³ According to Remer’s initial statement of the relation among the three subjects, because Cicero recognizes the potential danger that a politically powerful orator poses, “the eloquent orator must apply his rhetorical skills only after ‘having acquired all-embracing knowledge’ (3.55).”⁴ As Remer elaborates Cicero’s treatment of the three subjects, however, a more complicated account emerges: at some points Crassus proclaims that perfect eloquence requires “complete philosophical knowledge” (what Remer calls a “maximalist” approach), while at other points he recognizes that the orator’s other concerns allow him to master only “practically oriented philosophy” (what Remer calls a “minimalist” approach).⁵

In a preface to book 2 of *On the Orator* in his own voice (not using one of the characters in the dialogue), Cicero does maintain that the province of the orator is “all things that can fall into the disputation of men” (2.5).⁶ But because Cicero never claims (in his own voice or that of any of his characters) that anyone has attained such perfect wisdom, the successful uniting of philosophy and rhetoric occurs only on the “minimalist” approach. Indeed the very existence of a “minimalist” approach elsewhere in *On the Orator* proves that for Cicero there is no ultimate unity to be found between philosophy, on one hand, and rhetoric and politics, on the other: the pursuit of “all-embracing knowledge” must be so consuming that it leads one to neglect rhetoric, so the pursuit of knowledge must be curtailed to engage in rhetoric and politics. As I show in this article through an examination of the role of philosophy in the entire dialogue, for Cicero the tension between philosophy and rhetoric is greater than Zarecki, Nicgorski, and Remer indicate.

As we follow the dialogue, we will see the relation between philosophy and rhetoric change: from a distortion of philosophy to make it suitable for

² Walter Nicgorski, *Cicero’s Skepticism and His Recovery of Political Philosophy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 214. Parenthetical references are to book and section numbers of *On the Orator*.

³ Gary Remer, “Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Politics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Cicero’s Philosophy*, ed. Jed W. Atkins and Thomas Bénatouïl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 200.

⁴ Remer relies on the following edition: Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator*, trans. James M. May and Jakob Wisse (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁵ Remer, “Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Politics,” 209–10. A similar claim to Remer’s is made by James E. G. Zetzel, *The Lost Republic: Cicero’s “De oratore” and “De re publica”* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 92–98, 146, 151.

⁶ Translations of Cicero’s works are mine. I use the Latin text of *On the Orator* edited by Kazimierz F. Kumaniecki (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1995).

rhetoric in book 1, to a greater role for philosophy in rhetoric in book 2, to an attempted fusion of philosophy with rhetoric in book 3. Along the way, we will see Crassus and Marcus Antonius, the two main characters, show a superficial appreciation of philosophy that contrasts with the deeper devotion to philosophy of their author Cicero, as revealed in other philosophical works where he mostly adheres to the skeptical approach of the New Academy. Cicero is not attempting to provide a precise account of the degrees of philosophy, law, and rhetorical training that should inform the orator. Rather he is bringing to the reader's attention the difficulties involved in combining the quest for wisdom with the pursuit of rhetorical excellence.

ON THE ORATOR, BOOK 1: A TRUNCATED PHILOSOPHY

Completed in 55 BC, *On the Orator* begins with an introduction by Cicero in his own voice, addressed to his brother Quintus. The two men have disagreed about rhetoric: Cicero has argued that oratory requires “the arts of the most accomplished men” (what today we call the liberal arts), while Quintus has maintained that it is separate from education, requiring only natural talent and practice (1.5). To support his position, Cicero points to the scarcity of great orators; the cause of that dearth, he argues, is the difficulty of the task. Scientific investigation and dialectic have produced a good number of polymaths, but not many great orators (1.8–11). Oratory requires “knowledge of all great subjects and arts. For it is from the understanding of things that oratory may properly blossom and spread. And unless the orator has grasped and understood the subject at hand, the delivery will be somewhat empty and almost childish” (1.20).

One of the two main characters is Crassus, consul in 95 BC, four years before both the dramatic date and the year of his death. Crassus studied philosophy and rhetoric in Asia and Athens. He became the most distinguished Roman orator before Cicero and a leader of the moderate aristocrats. The other principal figure is Marcus Antonius, consul in 99 BC, also renowned as an orator. The conversation is set during a holiday in a place of relaxation, Crassus's villa at Tusculum, but it occurs at a time of crisis for Rome: a consul and a tribune are at odds over a number of proposals, including one to enfranchise either Rome's Italian allies or the Latins (the facts are sketchy), and war with the allies will soon erupt. At the beginning of the dialogue, Crassus and Antonius are joined by three others. One of them is Quintus Mucius Scaevola, an elder, Stoic jurist, consul in 117 BC, and an augur. The

other two are younger orators. Crassus, Antonius, and Scaevola were all mentors to Cicero; Crassus was his primary tutor in rhetoric.

In his brief opening speech, Crassus claims that there is something inherently good in the orator's ability to sway an audience (1.30), but the highest achievement of eloquence has been to gather people and lead them from wilderness to civilization (1.33). Oratory continues to be essential for ruling, as "the control and wisdom of the complete orator" are the key to the safety of the republic as well as to his personal reputation (1.34). We may infer that complete eloquence depends on wisdom. After Scaevola accuses Crassus of giving too much credit and scope to oratory and of thereby depreciating wisdom (1.35–44), Crassus appeals to Plato, who, he says, slyly denigrated rhetoric in his *Gorgias* while demonstrating a great talent for it (1.47). Despite his writings, Plato knew that wisdom and rhetoric could be complementary. (Crassus does not refer to Plato's *Phaedrus*, which offers a more positive treatment of rhetoric, but *Phaedrus* is in the background of *On the Orator*.)⁷ Even if the orator is limited to law-courts and assemblies, he must know human nature, laws, and customs—or, as Crassus says shortly thereafter, "the natures of human beings and the entire significance of humanity" (1.53; cf. 1.60). Then the orator will lack no knowledge of "the greatest things" (1.48). What Crassus means by "greatest" is not immediately clear, but in book 3 he will specify "the greatest things" as political (3.109).

At any rate, Crassus makes clear that knowledge and reflection are the province of not only the philosopher but also the orator, and that philosophy is speechless without oratory because even a person who fully knows a subject cannot talk in a learned manner unless he knows how to "polish" a speech; Socrates was wrong to suggest otherwise (1.56–57, 60, 63). Crassus argues that the separation of wisdom from oratory has had dire consequences for the pursuit of virtue. As a concession to the status quo, he recognizes two of the three areas of philosophy—physics and logic—as belonging to the philosopher, but he insists on preserving for the orator ethics and the development of prudence (1.60, 64, 68–69). Then Crassus says that the orator must be educated in all the arts befitting freeborn men (1.72–73). That remark hints at a withdrawal of the concession of physics and logic to the philosopher.⁸ After Scaevola—the old defender of the civil law—leaves at the end of book

⁷ For Cicero's intended similarities and differences between *Phaedrus* and *On the Orator*, see Zetzel, *Lost Republic*, 142–43.

⁸ Zetzel, *Lost Republic*, 110.

1 and the others need not worry about offending him, Crassus will claim all subjects for the orator (3.80, 122).⁹

It is no mere coincidence that while Scaevola is present, Crassus devotes much attention to the connection between civil law and philosophy, and that both he and Antonius define the orator's scope and the field of philosophy narrowly. The way to eloquence, Crassus says, can best be paved by careful writing and by the study of poetry, history, and "all the respectable arts"; by the practice of arguing both sides of every question; by knowledge of civil law, antiquity, senatorial custom, the proper training in the republic, rights of allies, treaties, pacts, and foreign policy; and by a charming sense of humor (1.150–53, 158, 159). Sophists had the reputation of being able to argue different sides of a question, but so did philosophers. For many Romans there was no difference between a sophist and a philosopher—they were equally suspect—so it is no accident that Cicero has Crassus mention that activity in the middle of the list, where it will not receive so much attention.¹⁰ Crassus outlines a project for systematizing civil law to make it a true art (1.188–90). The tool to be used for that purpose, he says, is the same as what has been used to connect isolated elements in other subjects (music, mathematics, astronomy, grammar) and make them arts (1.187–88). He does not utter the word "dialectic," the art of reasoning, which was not respectable to many Romans because of its tendency to criticize ruling opinions about justice.¹¹

Regarding the reverse contribution of civil law to philosophy, Crassus makes two striking claims. First, the "sources" of *all* philosophical arguments are to be found in civil law and statutes (1.193). That claim can be maintained only if physics and logic are excluded from philosophy. It turns out that Crassus's earlier concession of physics and logic to philosophers was a concession not merely to the status quo but also to political respectability. Second, all political science, all knowledge about politics, is contained in the Twelve Tables, the collection of laws compiled under the decemvirate, or rule of ten men, between 451 and 449 BC. The Twelve Tables dealt mostly with relations among private individuals, although there were also provisions concerning the taking of bribes by judges and treason, as well as a law forbidding intermarriage between patricians and plebeians. Absent from the Twelve

⁹ In a letter to his closest friend, Titus Pomponius Atticus, Cicero compares the role of Scaevola in *On the Orator* to that of Cephalus in Plato's *Republic*: both must leave for a richer philosophical discussion to occur (*Letters to Atticus* 4.16.3).

¹⁰ Later it is disputed whether the Romans had a general distrust of philosophy (2.154–55).

¹¹ For more on dialectic, see *On the Orator* 2.111, 157–60.

Tables, as far as we know, were laws concerning the organization of offices in the Roman Republic. It is thus impossible to agree with Crassus's two claims, or to see how Cicero could agree with them, in light of *On the Republic*, which he began to write the following year, and *On the Laws*; in both of those works Cicero makes philosophical arguments that are not based on civil law or statutes, and he makes claims about the organization of offices.¹²

It is more defensible to hold, as Crassus does shortly thereafter, that the Twelve Tables should be praised for being authoritative and advantageous (1.195). Yet even that judgment is rendered doubtful by Crassus's subsequent remarks. They originally seem to be entirely motivated by filial devotion: we must first learn our fatherland's customs because it is our "parent" and because we should think that as much wisdom went into establishing our law as went into acquiring the resources of empire (1.196).¹³ Later, however, when one of the younger orators, Publius Sulpicius Rufus, asks him to discuss oratory in more depth, he replies to Sulpicius and the other younger orator, Gaius Aurelius Cotta, that his treatment so far has been designed in accordance with "your will instead of my custom or nature," "so that I might hold you with me more easily" (1.206). Apparently Crassus wants to keep them as his students rather than have them turn to Antonius (cf. 2.40).¹⁴ Crassus has been so convincing that—much to his and Antonius's surprise—he seems to have won over Scaevola to the view that the complete orator has all the qualities of the statesman, or at least Crassus has awed Scaevola into acquiescence (1.165, 214, 234). His celebration of civil law—including his self-interested praise of the Twelve Tables—did the job.

In book 1 of *On the Orator*, philosophy is to be limited by the goal of the civil law: "the preservation of legal and customary evenhandedness in the affairs and cases of citizens" (1.188). But if philosophy is to look no more deeply than to what is contained in the civil law, another result will be a sharp curtailment of the search for wisdom.¹⁵ From book 1, then, it appears that the only way in which Cicero can see rhetoric as serving the public welfare

¹² Crassus's claim is implausible even if we agree with one commentary that he is referring to "(applied) political expertise" instead of theoretical political knowledge. Jakob Wisse, Michael Winterbottom, and Elaine Fantham, *M. Tullius Cicero "De oratore" libri III*, vol. 5 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 2008), 100.

¹³ Cf. Plato, *Crito* 50d–51e, where Socrates tells Crito that the laws themselves claim to be Socrates's parents.

¹⁴ Anton D. Leeman, Harm Pinkster, and Hein L. W. Nelson, *M. Tullius Cicero "De oratore" libri III*, vol. 2 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1985), 126.

¹⁵ Contrast Cicero's approach at *On the Laws* 1.17.

is to treat philosophy, on which rhetoric depends, as a nondialectical subject—except insofar as it aids in systematizing civil law. To produce harmony between philosophy and rhetoric, the former must be truncated, not welcomed as the quest for wisdom to which Cicero himself is strongly attracted.¹⁶

ON THE ORATOR, BOOK 2: A GREATER ROLE
FOR PHILOSOPHY IN RHETORIC

In book 2, the discussion (set on the next day) changes. Antonius spoke against the importance of philosophy for oratory in book 1, but Cicero—again in a preface in his own voice—says that Antonius did so because he wanted his speeches to be acceptable to Romans (2.4; cf. 2.153, 156). Crassus was also less than forthcoming in book 1, Cicero now says, because he wanted to keep a reputation for disdain learning and for preferring Roman studies to Greek philosophy. Moreover, as he did in the preface to book 1, Cicero affirms the importance of learning for oratory. Indeed “without all knowledge” no one “can be preeminent” in speaking (2.5). No definite boundary can be set on the knowledge required for speaking well—that is, “knowledgeably, skillfully, and ornately.” Cicero avers that, in both Rome and Greece, many men have received “great praise for speaking without the highest knowledge of all things; in truth I confirm that such eloquence as was in Crassus and Antonius could not have existed if they had not known about all things that conduce to such prudence and such ability to speak as was in them” (2.6). Cicero leaves open the answer to the question, How great a prudence and an ability to speak was in them? In *Brutus* (the title is the same in Latin), the second part of Cicero's trilogy on rhetoric, Cicero has himself, as a character in the dialogue, say that Antonius had too little instruction in such arts as poetry, history, and law.¹⁷

In book 2, Antonius adopts a different approach from that of the first day: he admits to having studied Greek literature—and not merely to improve his oratorical powers, but also for pleasure (2.28, 55–59). When he describes his earlier denial of foreign learning as part of an attempt to refute Crassus and win over the young Rufus and Cotta, the lesson to be learned is that the desire for preeminence is central to oratory, particularly when the prize is

¹⁶ Joy Connolly does not recognize the distortion that philosophy has undergone for the sake of law when she claims that Crassus praises philosophy more than law in book 1. Joy Connolly, *The State of Speech: Rhetoric and Political Thought in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 110.

¹⁷ Cicero, *Brutus* 214. The third part of the trilogy is *Orator* (again the title is the same in Latin).

promising young students (2.40; cf. 1.33). Now Scaevola, the defender of the civil law, has left, and two established, older orators—the poet and former consul Quintus Lutatius Catulus and the famous wit Gaius Iulius Caesar Strabo Vopiscus—have just arrived; so Antonius may be more candid.

Antonius is now more open to a place for philosophy in the orator's education (2.156). After he has recognized three functions of oratory—proving a point, stirring the soul, and winning someone over to one's side—as forms of persuasion (2.114–15, 128–29), he treats the invention of abstract, common arguments with the first of those functions in view (2.162–77).¹⁸ For Catulus, supplying proof appears to be the only function worth considering, and he urges Antonius on to the second oratorical activity (after invention): arrangement of arguments (2.179). But Antonius knows that most people make most of their decisions on the basis of emotion, not reason (2.178). Nevertheless, the primacy of emotion requires that its use be guided by a prudence that is based on knowledge of human psychological tendencies (2.204–11).

A long excursus on wit, conducted mainly by Strabo, drives home the point that appeals to emotion are not a matter of following rules (2.216–90). Crassus interjects the claim that that point is true of invention as a whole; rules can help us merely discern the merit (or lack of it) in what we have done through natural talent and training (2.232). We are led toward the conclusions that an orator must have good judgment and that philosophy, now more broadly conceived than in book 1, may help form judgment.

Although Antonius is more favorable to philosophy in book 2, he treats philosophical subjects with the goal of effective public speaking in mind. For example, the question of possible conflict between what is reputable and what is advantageous was much debated by philosophers in Cicero's day. It would concern Cicero through his last published work, *On Duties*, the year before he died. In *On the Orator*, however, Antonius discusses the matter in an almost entirely neutral way: those who favor the pursuit of advantage (*utilitas*) speak of power, wealth, and security, while those who favor reputation (*dignitas*) speak of the glory of ancestors and claim that true advantage cannot be obtained separately from reputation (2.334–35). Antonius does not explicitly judge that dispute, but he does give priority in oratory to claims of necessity: “For all deliberation is immediately cut short if it is understood that something cannot be done or if necessity is brought forward. And whoever has taught this to others who could not see it, has seen the farthest”

¹⁸ Cf. Zetzel, *Lost Republic*, 105.

(2.336). By contrast, in *On Duties* Cicero distinguishes between honorableness (*honestas*) and advantage, and he appears to take the stand that what is advantageous will never conflict with what is honorable.

ON THE ORATOR, BOOK 3: PHILOSOPHY AND RHETORIC JOINED

When the dialogue resumes in book 3 (after another preface by Cicero), discussion of the third oratorical activity, diction, renews a controversy from book 2. At the beginning of his remarks on invention, Antonius said he would treat that subject and then yield to Crassus for a statement on diction (2.123). By (twice) praising Antonius's combination of substance and diction in reply, Crassus suggests that the two things belong together (2.124–25, 350). Early in book 3, he makes that point more strongly: “Since all speech consists of substance and words, words have no place if you subtract the substance, and substance has no light if you remove the words. . . . The ornamentation of words cannot be found if the thoughts have not been created and expressed, and no thought can be lucid [*illustris*] without light from words” (3.19, 24).¹⁹

To support that thesis, Crassus relies upon the belief of ancient philosophers that the universe is united by a single force, or at least that all human arts are united (3.20–21). If either of those beliefs is true, then the art of lucid thought is united with the art of clear expression. Scholars note that this speech of Crassus is “part of the overall persuasive design of book 3, which is aimed at making Cicero's main idea, that an orator needs philosophical knowledge, gradually acceptable to his readers. . . . The idea is presented in four ‘waves.’”²⁰ This passage (3.19–24) is the first “wave.”

In the second “wave” (3.52–90), Crassus subjects both the Stoics and Socrates to qualified criticism. Regarding the former, he remarks that eloquence is “one of the highest virtues. Yet all virtues are equal and equivalent, but still one appearance is more beautiful and illustrious [*illustris*] than another” (3.55).²¹ With that blatant self-contradiction, he mocks the Stoic teaching that all virtues are equal: Mnesarchus, pupil of the Stoic Panaetius, argued that eloquence is a virtue and that wisdom necessarily accompanies it (1.83). Yet Crassus immediately adds that oratory has such force—even when it has “embraced knowledge of things”—that it must be “joined to

¹⁹ The Latin for “be found,” *inveniri*, is related to the noun *inventio* and thus to both my earlier uses of “invention” in this article and my later explanation of Cicero's *On Invention* (*De inventione*).

²⁰ Wisse, Winterbottom, and Fantham, *M. Tullius Cicero “De oratore,”* 1.

²¹ Perhaps Cicero intends here to make us doubt that eloquence is a virtue at all. See Elaine Fantham, *The Roman World of Cicero's “De Oratore”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 247–48.

goodness and the highest prudence” (3.55). Otherwise the result will be to “give weapons to madmen.” Crassus finds common ground with the Stoics on the orator’s need for good character, but he differs from them by denying that prudence, the part of philosophy that is ethics, necessarily accompanies the nonethical parts of philosophy.²²

In former times, Crassus continues, the Greeks used the term “wisdom” (Latin *sapientia*) to refer to the combination of the abilities to think and speak; one set of instructors taught both how to act rightly and how to speak well (3.56–57). The most talented among the Greeks, however, preferred to spend their time in private study “because of the tranquility and pleasantness of knowledge itself,” and more people did so “than was advantageous for republics.” Note that it is not necessarily harmful for a republic if *some* people devote their lives to private study. Crassus is critical of “the dialecticians,” who “created a new study and game for themselves” (3.58). In book 1, where Crassus was attempting to portray philosophy as politically responsible, dialectic was suggested (albeit implicitly) as the tool to systematize civil law. Here his purpose is different.

As I have mentioned, foremost among those whom Crassus blames for shirking public responsibility is Socrates. After praising Socrates for his “prudence, sharpness, charm, and subtlety” as well as for the “eloquence, variety, and copiousness” of his discussion, Crassus criticizes him for having “separated the knowledge of thinking wisely from that of speaking ornately—which in fact cohere.... Hence there has arisen an undoubtedly absurd, disadvantageous, and reprehensible severance between the tongue and the heart, as it were, so that some people teach us to be wise, others to speak” (3.60–61). Remarkably, however, nowhere in *On the Orator* does Cicero have any character even attempt to refute Socrates’s condemnation in *Gorgias* of rhetoric as hostile to truth.²³

In the third “wave” (3.104–25), Crassus treats diction as it pertains to the orator’s handling of general questions. The most ornate speeches, he says, move from the particular controversy to the significance of the subject so that the audience may base its verdict on the nature of the parties and the crimes (3.120). Aware that philosophers are at least as well known for making the same movement from the particular to the general (though for a different

²² Anton D. Leeman, Harm Pinkster, and Jakob Wisse, *M. Tullius Cicero “De oratore” libri III*, vol. 4 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1996), 200–201.

²³ Wisse, Winterbottom, and Fantham, *M. Tullius Cicero “De oratore,”* 110.

purpose), Crassus insists on defending the orator's right to this territory, which philosophers have wrongly "seized" (3.122). In fact Crassus expands the orator's territory from the second "wave": the second "wave" included ethics and politics, but the third encompasses nature as well.²⁴ It is significant, though, that Crassus urges the orator to learn *quickly* about justice, duty, governance, morals, and nature and apply that learning to political science, for no one has such sharp insight that he can see all those things without having them pointed out to him (3.122–24).

With that speech Crassus seems to have finished his treatment of the relation between knowledge and oratory. But Catulus replies in such a way as to begin a fourth "wave" (3.126–43): he agrees with Crassus about the orator's right to expansive possessions, and his criticism of specialization leads Crassus to say that eloquent philosophers deserve to be called orators and wise orators should be called philosophers. Neither eloquence without wisdom nor the reverse deserves praise. Nevertheless, Crassus prefers wisdom without eloquence to the reverse (3.142). First prize should go to the learned orator. If philosophers admit that he is one of them, the controversy ends. But if they divorce the two and force Crassus to choose, he will say that the complete orator—who has learned quickly—has "all the knowledge" of the philosopher, whereas eloquence is not necessarily part of the philosopher's ability (3.143). As for the decision whether to accept the unity of wisdom and eloquence, Crassus tellingly leaves it to the philosophers.²⁵

CRASSUS AND ANTONIUS CONTRASTED WITH CICERO

Let us now examine the tension between philosophy and rhetoric that remains after Cicero's reconciliation of them in *On the Orator*. As the fourth "wave" of the attempt to fuse philosophy and rhetoric suggests, Cicero is aware that the fusion is not simple or complete. He has done his best to make rhetoric serve the public good and to harness philosophy to serve rhetoric, but he has had to cover over differences between the two. He has not even pretended that the fusion is simple. After the early speech in which Crassus insists that the orator should be educated in the arts suitable to freeborn men, Scaevola perceptively observes that Crassus has made the arts the "servants" of the orator (1.74–75). But, he cogently asks, will "the subject and the truth itself" allow that relation to exist (1.77)? Will the orator have time to do justice to the arts?

²⁴ Ibid., 42.

²⁵ May and Wisse, *Ideal Orator*, 266n174.

In other words, will something in the arts—including philosophy—resist being put in the service of oratory, which relies so much on popular appeal? Crassus has no better reply here than to say that he is not the complete orator, but he will not admit that such a person could never exist (1.78–79).

Antonius further develops Scaevola's questions in book 1. He argues that Crassus's model of the complete orator requires for its actualization considerable leisure, which the orator is unlikely to have; moreover, if he had that leisure, his retreat from public and private business would lead to a meager, ineffective manner of speaking that is characteristic of philosophers (1.80–81). An orator, he says later, is one who can use agreeable language to persuade people in forensic cases and public affairs (1.213). The orator should have "tasted" knowledge in many fields, but he does not need to possess it (1.218). By contrast, a philosopher is one who "is eager to know the significance, nature, and causes of divine and human things, and to grasp and attain a plan for living well" (1.212). Antonius distinguishes the orator and the philosopher from the person he calls the "guide of the republic" who is "an author of public policy," who "has devoted his own experience, knowledge, and eagerness to directing the republic, . . . who grasps and uses the means by which the advantage of the republic is obtained and increased" (1.211).²⁶

Antonius's use of definitions of orator, philosopher, and guide is intended to draw bright lines between such different activities as oratory and philosophy. It is part of a diminishing of philosophy insofar as philosophy pertains to oratory. Yet it recalls the philosopher Socrates's insistence on beginning a discussion with definition in Plato's *Phaedrus*.²⁷ Moreover, this speech by Antonius also serves to remind us of the demanding nature of philosophy, as he tells Crassus that philosophers wedded to the lofty model of Plato's *Republic* would not have allowed Crassus to say in a speech before an assembly that the senate should be the servant of the people; Crassus has previously used oratory for the unphilosophical purpose of flattery (1.224–26). In book 1 Crassus explicitly defends a higher status for philosophy than Antonius does, but it would be an error to see Antonius as simply hostile to philosophy in this first part of the dialogue. Indeed one may wonder whether Antonius shows a greater respect for philosophy than Crassus does. Relying on the examples of the Stoic politician Publius Rutilius Rufus and Socrates, Antonius again

²⁶ Later Crassus implies that the guide will also be an excellent orator, so the two are not mutually exclusive (3.63).

²⁷ Plato, *Phaedrus* 237b–d. Cf. *On the Orator* 2.108 and Cicero, *On the Republic* 1.38. Cf. Zetzel, *Lost Republic*, 134, in a different context.

recalls to his listeners the tension between conscientious philosophy and effective rhetoric, highlighting the point with the extreme claim that oratory can reach its perfection without philosophy (1.227–33). There is not enough time for the orator to learn everything that Crassus says is necessary (1.252, 256). The orator should rely on his nature and experience, especially his knowledge of the minds and senses of his audience (1.223). At the end of book 1, Crassus remarks that he doubts Antonius's sincerity in his last speech because it showed a philosopher's knack for refutation (1.263).²⁸ As I have noted, Cicero confirms Crassus's suspicion to the reader in the preface to book 2.

In book 2, Antonius maintains that any subject that should be treated “ornately and seriously” is the province of the orator (2.34). Later he narrows the general or impersonal subjects for which the orator is responsible to ethical and political matters (2.67–68)—the concession that Crassus originally made but retracted. Later Antonius also retracts the concession by hinting that he will also listen to what the Greeks say about physics, and that other orators should as well (2.153).²⁹ Antonius begins to look more like Cicero, who is unwilling to separate abstract academic subjects from oratory (cf. 2.5).

Yet even in book 2, Antonius's commitment to oratory exceeds his commitment to philosophy. When Catulus accuses Antonius of “nearly declaring war on philosophy” (2.155) because of the latter's stated aversion to relying on the Greeks, Antonius replies, “Hardly. I have rather determined to philosophize as Neoptolemus does in Ennius's play, ‘a little—for it is unacceptable to do so to the fullest extent’” (2.156).³⁰ The ineffectiveness of philosophy demonstrates its unacceptability.

Throughout the dialogue, Cicero is determined to highlight the competitive essence of activity that aims at persuasion. At the beginning, when Crassus posits an unusually great role for eloquence in world history, he says that it is natural for someone to strive to surpass other people in the very respect by which humans surpass other animals (1.33). That seems to be the link for him between speaking and ruling. As I have noted, both Crassus

²⁸ Most striking in that speech was Antonius's refutation of himself: he argued that audiences judge orators less harshly than they judge actors, whereas in an earlier address he claimed the opposite (1.124–25, 258–59).

²⁹ May and Wisse, *Ideal Orator*, 163n111.

³⁰ The reference is probably to Ennius's *Andromache*. Antonius specifically dismisses dialectic from oratory on the grounds that it offers no method for discovering truth, only for judging it; dialectic finds difficulties in arguments but does not solve them (2.157–58).

and Antonius admit that their attempts to refute each other in book 1 were not based on significantly different views; rather they were designed to win over the two younger orators (1.206, 2.40). The message is that oratory is inherently competitive. As Antonius says, eloquence belongs to an art that is separate from other arts (2.36–38), and eloquence is not just any art, because “experience in speaking . . . dominates in every peaceful, free political community [*civitate*]” (2.33). Catulus also indicates the competitive nature of oratory: commenting on the *Gorgias*, he sharply observes that if Socrates defeated Gorgias in Plato’s *Gorgias*, the former must have been the superior orator (3.129). In other words, if there was a verbal contest, the victory must have come through oratory, because philosophy is ill suited for competition.

Antonius’s limited respect for philosophy leads him to a misjudgment concerning religion. Catulus claims that it requires “much more effort to speak about the nature of the gods than about the lawsuits of human beings,” but Antonius replies that anyone familiar with literature can discuss such issues, while it is more difficult to convince a judge and conquer an enemy in court (2.71–73). Catulus has the better of this argument. The difficulty of discussing religion is not only substantive, involving ultimate questions about the universe, but also political: careless treatment of the subject can upset friends and cause widespread controversy and even upheaval. Cicero seems to agree by having Antonius compare forensic argument to Phidias’s sculpting of Minerva, Roman goddess of wisdom, while Antonius compares discussion of less weighty subjects to the fashioning of her shield. Antonius thus unintentionally likens legal reasoning to producing the appearance of wisdom, whereas speaking about the gods—activity that is the shield of wisdom for some people—is supposedly easier. The analogy to sculpting hardly makes his case more convincing. He even contravenes his own argument by not using the name of the Greek goddess of wisdom, Athena, with the Greek Phidias; he must be careful to use Roman names of divinities for a Roman audience. Cicero is suggesting that it is not so easy to speak about the gods after all.³¹

Many scholars fail to grasp Cicero’s full message in *On the Orator* because they do not recognize that Crassus and Antonius illustrate shortcomings. James Zetzel calls the two men “Cicero’s mouthpieces, the vehicle for his own account of oratory.”³² Another error is to identify Crassus’s words

³¹ As Fantham observes, religion plays little role in this dialogue (*Roman World*, 23).

³² Zetzel, *Lost Republic*, 50 (cf. 48, 58, 71, 73).

with Cicero's deepest thoughts, as Zetzel does when he writes, "It is Crassus, throughout, who expresses the most elevated notions of both oratory and intellectual life; they are views to which Cicero is sympathetic, and not just in *De oratore*."³³ At times the identification is qualified, as when Brian Vickers calls Crassus "for much of the time Cicero's mouthpiece."³⁴ But the general consensus among scholars is that Cicero intends for Crassus to represent his views.³⁵ That error can be avoided if one sees the difference between Cicero's deep devotion to philosophy and Crassus's limited commitment to it.³⁶

The earliest of Cicero's writings that may be classified among his philosophical works is the treatise *On Invention* (*De inventione*), written probably between the ages of fifteen and nineteen.³⁷ In this context the Latin *inventio* means "coming upon," or finding, the subject matter of a speech so as to make that speech convincing. In his second treatise on rhetoric, *On the Orator*, composed when he was fifty-one, Cicero writes somewhat disparagingly of the earlier book (1.5). The possibility that the book does not measure up to Cicero's later standards, however, does not mean that we should ignore it. *On Invention* is important because of what Cicero writes about his purpose and method. Here is a most remarkable statement from a boy or young man: "Indeed, without any affirmation but at the same time inquiring, I will say each single thing hesitatingly, lest while I might attain the small point of fully writing this conveniently enough, I might lose the greatest point of not admitting the truth of anything rashly and arrogantly. In fact I will follow this truth at this time and in the entirety of life, as far as ability provides."³⁸ At first those words may appear self-contradictory: If Cicero will not affirm anything, how can he speak as if he has found a truth? The Latin for "affirmation,"

³³ *Ibid.*, 106–7.

³⁴ Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 30.

³⁵ Those other scholars include the following: Giuseppe Ballacci, *Political Theory between Philosophy and Rhetoric: Politics as Transcendence and Contingency* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 56; Bryan Garsten, *Saving Persuasion: A Defense of Rhetoric and Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 166; Daniel Kapust, "Cicero on Decorum and the Morality of Rhetoric," *European Journal of Political Theory* 10 (January 2011): 93, 109n32; George Kennedy, *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World: 300 B.C.–A.D. 300* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 228–29; Nicgorski, *Cicero's Skepticism*, 123, 163, 214, 233n2; and Zarecki, *Cicero's Ideal Statesman*, 63, 174n36.

³⁶ I do not go so far as to claim that Cicero considers the philosophic way of life superior to the political way of life. Cicero's own life does not allow that conclusion to be confidently drawn. I do not contradict the argument of—to take one notable example—Carlos Lévy, "Philosophical Life versus Political Life: An Impossible Choice for Cicero?," in *Cicero's Practical Philosophy*, ed. Walter Nicgorski (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 58–78.

³⁷ Concerning the date of *On Invention*, see Kennedy, *Art of Rhetoric*, 106–10.

³⁸ Cicero, *On Invention* 2.10.

affirmatio, can mean “an act of asserting definitively or dogmatically”; the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* gives our passage as an example of that meaning.³⁹ To make an *affirmatio* is to be dogmatic, and Cicero will not be dogmatic. The phrase “to admit the truth of” expresses the Latin *assentire*, which can also mean “to agree with.”⁴⁰ *Assentire* can also indicate dogmatism. Cicero conveys the point more effectively by stating what he will not do in the form of a noun (*affirmatio*) and what he will do in the form of a participle (*quaerentes*, “inquiring”); the noun signifies something fixed, while the present participle signifies an ongoing action. And what would be the goal of Cicero’s inquiring, if not the truth? He uses the word “truth” when appropriate, when he thinks he has found a sound method of living. At this early age, Cicero seems to be at least as devoted to philosophy as he is to rhetoric.⁴¹

It might be objected that the just-considered statement from Cicero refers not to a method of living or to philosophy, but rather to the rhetorical proving and disproving of conclusions. But the objection would be unsound: Cicero says that he is speaking about not only rhetoric but “other studies” as well.⁴² Moreover, he promises that he will follow the method “in the entirety of life” (*in omni vita*), which—whatever else it means—refers to more than the proving and disproving of conclusions. Finally, we know that Cicero had been studying philosophy before he wrote *On Invention*.

Cicero’s statement aligns him most closely with the New Academy, the school of philosophy descended from Plato that welcomed arguments from both, or all, sides of a question in the search for truth. New Academics maintained that probability was as close to truth as a person would probably come. Even at this early age, Cicero sees a connection between philosophy and rhetoric in the method that each uses, relying on argument and counterargument to arrive at the best answer.

Several decades later, Cicero remarks that he must philosophize, and not just a little bit, as some—such as the character Antonius—would want; for philosophizing is such that, once begun, it is difficult to go only part of the way.⁴³ Then he praises the Academy for being most faithful to “that true and

³⁹ *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “affirmatio.”

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, s.v. “assentio.”

⁴¹ Cf. Cicero, *Brutus* 306.

⁴² Cicero, *On Invention* 2.5.

⁴³ Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 2.1.

elegant philosophy, conducted by Socrates.⁴⁴ Then, however, he rises above the Academy by remarking that those who philosophize are “bound by the rules [*legibus*] of no single teaching” or school.⁴⁵ Cicero does not fully subscribe to any school because to philosophize means to maintain one’s ability for reflection. Although it may be difficult to believe that someone who rose to the highest office in Rome was dedicated to philosophy, Cicero may well have been thinking deeply about philosophical questions even during those periods of his life when he was actively involved in politics. Indeed it is possible to philosophize without immediately committing one’s thoughts to writing. After all, as Cicero is aware, Socrates philosophized without apparently writing anything. That possibility would help explain how Cicero could complete so many philosophical works between 46 and 44 BC during a time of enforced leisure.

By contrast, the character Crassus articulates a view of philosophy and wisdom that Cicero must know is difficult, if not impossible, to defend. After claiming for oratory the province of “the origin, meaning, and changes of all things,” Crassus asserts that he will not yield much ground to those who have devoted their lives to philosophy, for he has spent as much time philosophizing as he could (3.76–78). Philosophy is not like other arts, he says, because sharp minds, without much study, may discover the most probable answer to any question (3.79). Those who apply the arts in practical ways, such as orators, need less time in study than those who pursue a theoretical way of life, provided that their experience strengthens what they have learned and that they retain their eagerness (3.86–88). Unless a person learns a subject quickly, he will never master it (3.89). But Catulus doubts that Crassus is as devoted to wisdom as he claims (3.82), and his doubt is well founded. Crassus’s statements cannot be squared with the remarks of the Cicero of *On Invention*—or the Cicero of later works—who sees philosophy as lifelong activity, not as a quick-and-easy field of study. Crassus’s limited philosophizing makes it easier for him to proclaim the integration of philosophy and oratory.⁴⁶ One of the dangers of Crassus’s limited commitment to philosophy is his view that nothing in humanity is greater than politics—a claim that Cicero never utters in his own voice (3.109). That belief too easily leads to treating power as an end in itself.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.7.

⁴⁶ I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for developing this point.

It may be understandable to search for a single spokesman for Cicero in all his dialogues, especially because he makes himself a character in some of them, and because Socrates is so often taken to represent Plato's thoughts in his dialogues. But that search overlooks Cicero's own claim that he follows Socrates to "conceal my own opinion, raise up others from error, and in every argument seek what most appears to be true."⁴⁷

George Kennedy sensibly opines, "Of all the ideas expressed in *De oratore* perhaps the most objectionable is Crassus' claim (3.89) that unless a man can learn a subject quickly he can never learn it at all."⁴⁸ But why should Kennedy be sure that Cicero the author believes the same thing? Kennedy writes of Cicero, "Philosophy always fascinated him, but never satisfied him."⁴⁹ Even if we took Cicero's attempt to control Octavian in the year before Cicero's death as decisive evidence of his aversion to a purely philosophical life, it would not follow that the above passages showing his devotion to philosophy were either self-delusion or lies. "It is a pity," Kennedy continues, "that he had to hedge so much, and that in defining the orator he could not distinguish between knowledge of philosophy and an intellectual vitality which is always curious and always creative and views experience in a philosophical way."⁵⁰ But the fact that none of Cicero's characters in *On the Orator* sufficiently demonstrates that vitality does not prove that Cicero lacks it himself.

Not only does Cicero possess that vitality, which he shows in his philosophical works, but he also recognizes the extent to which philosophy and oratory are at odds. Philosophy inherently "flees the multitude," who are suspicious of it.⁵¹ Of course that same "multitude" is the orator's audience.

THE OTHER WORKS IN THE TRILOGY

As I have mentioned, *On the Orator* is the first work in a trilogy on oratory; the other two works are *Brutus* and *Orator*. In *On Divination*, Cicero gives a catalog of his philosophical works. He writes, "Because Aristotle and also

⁴⁷ Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 5.11.

⁴⁸ Kennedy, *Art of Rhetoric*, 228.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 228–29.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁵¹ Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 2.4. Rex Stem writes, "Oratory, for Cicero, is the voice for philosophical wisdom in the public practice of politics." Rex Stem, "Cicero as Orator and Philosopher: The Value of the *Pro Murena* for Ciceronian Political Thought," *Review of Politics* 68 (Spring 2006): 209. I do not disagree with that assertion, but Stem's article overlooks the extent to which Cicero's philosophizing is not oriented to the public.

Theophrastus, excellent men in subtlety and copiousness [of speech], joined the precepts of speaking with philosophy, it seems that my oratorical books should be regarded in the same group.”⁵² Then he names the three works. Is Cicero suggesting that philosophy and rhetoric are ultimately united in purpose?⁵³

We do not know how familiar Cicero was with the writings on rhetoric by Aristotle or his student Theophrastus. But the verb “joined” does not imply that Aristotle and Theophrastus saw philosophy and rhetoric as ultimately united, only that they saw that the two subjects could make common cause. Cicero sees the same.

The title of each work in the trilogy refers to a person, general or specific, not to a subject. Cicero seeks the fully developed or completed form of the orator.⁵⁴ That form must incorporate a degree of wisdom. But Cicero does not claim in either *Brutus* or *Orator* that the fully developed orator is a profound philosopher—only that “he should have knowledge of all the topics of philosophy that have been known and treated.”⁵⁵ Cicero immediately identifies those topics as “religion,” “death,” “piety,” “affection for the fatherland,” “good and bad things,” “virtues and vices,” “appropriate action,” “grief,” “pleasure,” and “disturbances and errors of the mind.” “Knowledge of all the topics” is not the same as mastery of the content of each topic. Moreover, none of those topics necessarily extends beyond ethics. Cicero continues, “I want him to be not ignorant of physics, so that he may be grander and, in a certain way, loftier. When he redirects himself from heavenly to human things, surely he will say and feel all things more loftily and magnificently.”⁵⁶ The reader should note the qualifier, “in a certain way.” It does not require deep study for a person to be “not ignorant” of a subject—especially when Cicero recommends study of physics for the sake of effective rhetoric. A deep student of physics, seeking wisdom, would be truly loftier. That person, however, would probably not be a fully developed orator. Further consideration of Cicero’s teaching in *Brutus* and *Orator* is beyond the scope of this article.

⁵² Cicero, *On Divination* 2.4.

⁵³ I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for raising this possibility, although I disagree with the reviewer’s conclusion that Cicero answers that question in the affirmative.

⁵⁴ Cicero, *Orator* 7, 101.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

LESSONS FROM *ON THE ORATOR*

What Cicero has not accomplished in *On the Orator* is a blueprint of the complete orator, so that a student would know how much philosophy to combine with how much law and how much practice in speaking. By the end of their discussion, Crassus and Antonius do not agree, even at a superficial level, whether dialectic has a role in oratory. It is not Cicero's purpose to provide a blueprint. His own career as an orator is not the instantiation of any theory of the perfect mix of study and practice.

What Cicero has accomplished are the elaboration and exploration of problems involved in the pursuit of rhetorical excellence. The primary problem concerns the role of wisdom, or of the quest for wisdom, in that pursuit. Philosophy and rhetoric have inherently conflicting goals: to live devoted to the pursuit of wisdom implies an unwillingness to be satisfied with appealing to public opinion; to live devoted to persuading others is to neglect the pursuit of wisdom. The fact that there is benefit from combining wisdom and rhetoric does not negate the tension between them. And the fact that there is tension between the two does not negate the benefit from combining them.

Thus on one hand, there is oratory. It aims to teach, delight, or move an audience, but above all to move it. Therefore, its entire force or significance is found in the grand manner of speaking. It is inherently competitive, for we may assume that people's goals will differ and that orators will strive against one another to accomplish them. Without a sense of shame, an orator may say something indecorous that will frustrate his goal. Oratory is rooted in the political community; in fact it is a necessary part of stable political life (political life that is not dictated by the whims of one person or a faction). Dialectic may contribute to rhetoric and may even be a form of it, but an excess of it will produce an ineffective orator.

On the other hand, there is philosophy. It aims to gain wisdom. Philosophy per se neglects the emotions, appealing only to others' reason, treating those people as if they were thinking machines. Philosophy appears not to be competitive: How can one person's gain of wisdom detract from another's? Its questioning of received beliefs may weaken a sense of shame. It is rooted in the political community but transcends the community. A philosopher qua philosopher will not recognize an excess of dialectic.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Remer himself draws a similar contrast to the one I have just made. Gary A. Remer, *Ethics and the Orator: The Ciceronian Tradition of Political Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 172–76. But he poses the distinction as between conversation—of which philosophy is only one kind—and oratory.

The contrast stated in the previous two paragraphs—in other words, the tension between philosophy and rhetoric—holds despite a similarity between philosophical and rhetorical methods, as I have explained. Both philosophy and rhetoric welcome arguments on both, or all, sides of a question. But that one method masks different intentions. Philosophizing does normally involve speaking, and speaking well may aid the philosopher. But a philosopher who aims to convince a less enlightened audience will have to make statements at odds with what the search for wisdom by itself would dictate. Conversely, successful oratory may somewhat depend on the attainment of wisdom, and the audience may gain in wisdom because the orator follows the method of the philosopher. The benefit in wisdom will likely be diluted, however, because the orator per se is aiming at moving an audience, not gaining wisdom to share with the audience. Moreover, an orator too devoted to philosophy will likely not succeed in persuasion, particularly if the audience is suspicious of too-clever speakers.

To claim that Cicero sees philosophy and rhetoric as ultimately reconciled in a greater whole called “eloquence” is to ignore the ways in which he demonstrates that their purposes are at odds with each other. To be sure, Cicero combines excellence in both philosophy and oratory in his own life; but he is well aware that they pull him in different directions.

“Solomon’s Science”: Spinoza on the Possibility and Limits of Ancient Philosophy

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Abstract: As Spinoza’s early Remonstrant critics noticed, the *Theologico-Political Treatise* (1670) elevates a philosophical Solomon above the prophets of the Hebrew Bible. Though Spinoza names Solomon *the* “Philosopher” (6.1.94), most scholars think this is hollow praise. How can Solomon be a philosopher without the mathematical knowledge and self-discipline that characterize true philosophy for Spinoza? I argue that the political and scientific failures of Solomon the Philosopher are more significant. Spinoza’s treatment of Solomon shows the limits of nonmathematical premodern philosophy and how these consign ancient philosophers to undermine the piety and peace of their communities. It suggests, furthermore, how mathematical and causal knowledge allow Spinoza’s philosophy to rescue theology and politics.

Some of the earliest critics of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* (1670) argue that Spinoza selects certain passages ascribed to Solomon, takes them out of their biblical context, and fashions an argument against miracles from them.¹ Spinoza argues that the Bible teaches that nature “keeps a fixed and unchangeable order.... Besides, the Philosopher in his Ecclesiastes 1:10 very clearly teaches that nothing new happens in nature” (6.1.94, 80).² Throughout the work, Spinoza challenges the traditional authorship of almost every book of the Hebrew scriptures; however, he never challenges the tradition that Solomon is the author of Proverbs 1–24, of almost all of Ecclesiastes, and of some parts of 1 Kings. In *A Vindication of Miracles* (1673), which Jonathan Israel calls “almost an official Remonstrant group response” to the

¹ Jacobus Batalier, *Vindiciae miraculorum, per quae divinae Religionis & fidei Christianae veritas olim confirmata fuit, adversus profanum auctorem Tractatus Theologico-politici* (Amsterdam, 1673), 51.

² Benedict Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, trans. Martin D. Yaffe (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2004). In-text citations are to chapter, paragraph, line, and page.

Theologico-Political Treatise,³ some of these minority dissenters from the Dutch Reformed church argue that Spinoza “absurdly” weighs passages such as Ecclesiastes 1:10—“Is there a thing of which it is said, ‘See, this is new’? It has already been, in the ages before us”⁴—more heavily than the combined testimony of all Jews and Christians, within and outside of the scriptures, to the occurrence of miracles.⁵ Much of their collective response fixates on Spinoza’s Solomon as a biblical philosopher who is critical of miracles.

Modern scholars dismiss the notion that Solomon is Spinoza’s philosophical mouthpiece in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*.⁶ Since Solomon lacks the “scientific sophistication for understanding the laws of nature” and the “private self-discipline in moral matters” integral to Spinoza’s conception of philosophy, Martin Yaffe argues, he “could not have been a philosopher except honorifically.”⁷ Paul Bagley agrees that “Solomon ultimately cannot be considered a philosopher” by Spinoza.⁸ Leo Strauss argues that Spinoza disqualifies Solomon as a philosopher for three reasons: Solomon lacks precise mathematical knowledge, Solomon is popular, and Spinoza argues that the Hebrew Bible contains “no philosophic things but only the most simple things” (see 13.1.4, 155).⁹ For Spinoza, mathematics offers a nonteleological “standard of truth” that is concerned with “essences” rather than “ends,”¹⁰ and

³ Jonathan Israel, “The Early Dutch and German Reaction to the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*,” in *Spinoza’s “Theologico-Political Treatise”: A Critical Guide*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Michael A. Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 72–101, 84.

⁴ My own citations of the Bible are to the New Revised Standard Version.

⁵ Batalier, *Vindiciae*, 36–39.

⁶ Susan James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics: The Theologico-Political Treatise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 58–59, argues that Spinoza invokes Solomon “to carve out a broad area of enquiry in which the writ of revelation does not run.” Other scholars downplay Solomon’s philosophical knowledge further or pass over it quickly. Yirmiyahu Yovel, “Bible Interpretation as Philosophical Praxis: A Study of Spinoza and Kant,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 11, no. 2 (1973): 212n62, calls Spinoza’s treatment of Solomon a “typical” example of his search for contradictions in the Bible. See also Steven Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell: Spinoza’s Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 114; J. Samuel Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Biblical Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 200n; Nancy K. Levene, *Spinoza’s Revelation: Religion, Democracy, Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 111. A rare exception is Robert Misrahi, “Spinoza and Christian Thought: A Challenge,” in *Speculum Spinozanum 1677–1977*, ed. Siegfried Hessing (London: Routledge, 1977), 387–417.

⁷ Martin D. Yaffe, “Interpretive Essay,” in *Theologico-Political Treatise*, by Benedict Spinoza, trans. Martin D. Yaffe (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2004), 310.

⁸ Paul J. Bagley, *Philosophy, Theology, and Politics: A Reading of Benedict Spinoza’s “Tractatus Theologico-Politicus”* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 66n113.

⁹ Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 172–73.

¹⁰ Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *Collected Writings of Benedict Spinoza*, 2 vols., ed. Edwin Curley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), Appendix to the First Part, 1:441.

also a geometric order (*more geometrico*) that makes the steps of deductive arguments precisely clear. Spinoza, like René Descartes before him, is one of the first philosophers to turn to mathematics to inform philosophical method in these ways. This raises some questions. Does Spinoza regard himself as among the first philosophers, properly speaking? In other words: Was there ancient philosophy at all, properly speaking? According to Spinoza, can philosophical truths be learned through common sense independent of any mathematical training?

Although Spinoza’s treatment of Solomon incensed his contemporaries, it is largely overlooked by modern scholars. In *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion* (1930), Strauss writes that Spinoza attributes to Solomon philosophical knowledge of the divine law, before arriving at the more skeptical view, mentioned above, in the “Preface to *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*” (1965).¹¹ And in his seminar on Spinoza in 1959, Strauss continues to acknowledge the “very special position” of “Proverbs and Ecclesiastes...the writings of Solomon,” which unlike other books of the Hebrew Bible do not constitute or reinforce public law, but are “merely based on natural reason.”¹² However, I would add that Spinoza treats Solomon’s writings in a special way, too.

While Spinoza questions the traditional authorship of the books of Moses, Judges, and Joshua (8.1.72, 110–11), plus the prophetic works and wisdom literature (10.1.8, 129–30), he never questions Solomon’s authorship of Proverbs 1–24, of most of Ecclesiastes, and of parts of 1 Kings. Furthermore, the *Theologico-Political Treatise* mentions all of the twenty-four books that constitute the Tanakh or Hebrew Bible, with one exception: the Song of Songs, a poem traditionally attributed to Solomon that celebrates sexual love.¹³ I shall argue that in the case of Solomon, Spinoza is engaged in historical fiction, not historical criticism, and constructs a cautionary tale of an ancient philosopher-king whose inadequate grasp of philosophy leads his kingdom to ruin.

¹¹ Leo Strauss, *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*, trans. E. M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 128 and 157. Strauss’s interpretation of the *Treatise* may shift after he considers the possibility of a “return to premodern philosophy,” and comes to view Spinoza, in contrast, as foreclosing any such return to the ancient philosophy of Solomon. See Leo Strauss, “Preface to *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*,” in *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 259.

¹² Leo Strauss, “Session 7: Theological-Political Treatise, chapters 8–11,” transcript of lecture for seminar “The Political Philosophy of Spinoza,” ed. David Wollenberg, Fall 1959, University of Chicago, <https://leostrausscenter.uchicago.edu/spinoza-autumn-1959/>.

¹³ Alexander Green suggests that Song of Songs is omitted because it would force Spinoza to confront allegory. I do not find this suggestion convincing. Alexander Green, “Spinoza on the Ethics of Courage and the Jewish Tradition,” *Modern Judaism* 33, no. 2 (2013): 213.

My argument steers a middle course between the Remonstrants and modern scholars like Strauss, Bagley, and Yaffe: I argue that Spinoza neither endorses Solomon as a philosopher nor regards him as unphilosophical. Instead, in the figure of this ancient Hebrew philosopher-king, Spinoza describes philosophy untrained by mathematical thinking, its limits, and the danger it poses to the piety and peace of the political community. Spinoza's Solomon is a failed philosopher or a philosophical failure. This philosophical failure leads to impiety and a war that destroys the United Monarchy. If Solomon's philosophy leads to theological and political catastrophes, then how can Spinoza's bombastic subtitle promise that the "Freedom of Philosophizing" is a necessary but not sufficient condition of "the Piety and Peace of the Republic being safe" (*salva pietate et reipublicae*).¹⁴ Spinoza must show how philosophy, which once could not secure kingdoms (and even destroyed them) can now secure republics, and which once undermined piety can now strengthen it. This story seems appropriate for the "potential philosophers"¹⁵ to whom the book is addressed. For modern scholars, the story of Solomon's failure in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* might be interesting because it suggests how Spinoza purports to transform philosophy and redeem its ancient theological and political failures.

The argument broadly follows Spinoza's considerations of Solomon in the order that they appear in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. (1) In chapters 1 and 2, Spinoza lays the foundations for his cautionary tale about Solomon's natural knowledge, its limits, and how it undermines the peace and piety of the United Monarchy. (2) In chapters 3 through 6, Spinoza presents four tenets of Solomon's natural knowledge in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Enumerating these four principles reveals their bleak conclusions and internal contradictions, and suggests why Spinoza thinks Solomon's common-sense philosophy does not offer him a fulfilling life. (3) In chapter 10, Spinoza explains why the compilers of the Hebrew Bible attempt to exclude Solomon's philosophical writings. (4) In chapter 19, Spinoza rehabilitates Solomon, in order to confirm the natural-right foundations of Spinoza's political philosophy. To explain why Solomon returns, despite being discredited in Spinoza's

¹⁴ Spinoza, *Œuvres III: Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 2nd ed., ed. Fokke Akkerman and Pierre-François Moreau (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2016), 54. When I include the Latin text, it is from this latest critical edition. I provide the Latin sometimes for clarity and also if, as here, I emend Yaffe's translation.

¹⁵ Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 168. These readers must fall between the "Philosophers" who already understand the chief things in the *Treatise* and the "vulgar, and all who struggle with the same emotions as the vulgar," whom it is impossible to persuade (P.6.1.33 and P.6.2.34, xxi–xxiii).

cautionary tale, I propose that Spinoza explicitly builds his political philosophy on the ruins of ancient wisdom that he ascribes to Solomon, in order to present his geometrical method as a missing keystone that can prevent philosophy’s historical theological and political failures in the future.

1. SOLOMON’S KNOWLEDGE, ITS LIMITS, AND HIS FAILURES

According to Spinoza, Solomon’s intelligence sets him above the prophets. His natural science is called “God’s science” and “divine” because it is beyond common knowledge (*Scientia etiam naturalis Salomonis Dei scientia vocatur, id est, divina sive supra communem*) (1.18.6, 9).¹⁶ Solomon’s knowledge is greater not by dint of his age or experience, but rather by dint of a specific “virtue and capacity” (1.17.6, 8). Solomon has a greater capacity to understand by the “natural light” (1.18.4). In his unfinished dialogue *The Search for Truth by means of the Natural Light*, Descartes endorses a method that steers clear of appeals to authority and wonder at the paradoxical and unknown, and empowers common sense.¹⁷ Spinoza’s use of the term is similar. The vulgar discount scientific knowledge because they prefer to hear about things that are rare and alien to their nature (1.1.3, 1). The prophets use their vivid imaginations to construct wonderful stories to secure the obedience of the vulgar to the law (Annotation 2, 239–40; cf. 2.1.1, 17). Although Solomon is called a prophet (2.8.11, 24), his writings are different insofar as they express the force of his “natural light” (4.4.34, 50). Solomon uniquely restricts himself to what can be known by common-sense reasoning about nature.

Solomon’s natural knowledge only sets him apart so far, however. Spinoza argues that all human beings have the natural light but disdain to use it (1.2.3, 1). The ancient Hebrews disdain common-sense knowledge almost entirely. Spinoza complains, “the Jews never make mention of intermediate or particular causes and do not care about them” (1.3.8, 2). Solomon’s writings alone are guarded against credulity. Yet the sum of his natural knowledge is modest.

¹⁶ Yaffe notes that Spinoza makes an odd choice to translate *chokmah* not as wisdom, but as “science,” to render 1 Kings 3:28 (Yaffe, “Interpretive Essay,” 9n64). Cf. Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 98.

¹⁷ The pivotal passage is at René Descartes, *The Search for Truth by means of the Natural Light*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 412. I am indebted to the discussion in Tyler J. Thomas, “Reason Reborn: Descartes, Philosophy, and the General Good of Men” (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2021), 214–15.

The sum of Solomon's natural knowledge, in chapter 1, is a common-sense view of the mortality of the soul. Spinoza's Solomon uses the natural light to reason that human beings and animals alike die and decompose, in contrast to the vulgar who imagine extraordinary things about the immortality of the human soul and the afterlife. Spinoza argues that the Hebrew word *ruach* indicates "mind or spirit itself" in Ecclesiastes 3:19 and 12:7 (1.17.18, 8). The two verses contradict one another apparently. In the first, the spirit returns to dust; in the second, the spirit returns to God. Spinoza only transcribes Ecclesiastes 12:7. He also truncates Ecclesiastes 3:19, transcribing the middle of the passage: "the Spirit (or soul) is the same for all" (1.17.18, 8). His biblically literate and Hobbesian¹⁸ readers know the rest: "... and humans have no advantage over animals, for all is vanity" (Eccles. 3:19). Solomon's natural light compels him to deny the immortality of the human soul. But the contradictory passage, Ecclesiastes 12:7, is not necessarily evidence that he is conflicted. Spinoza later explains that Ecclesiastes is only included in the Hebrew Bible because it begins and ends with the Law, adding that he doubts that these writings were "handed...down in good faith" (10.1.12, 130 and 10.2.57, 138). If the last chapter, Ecclesiastes 12, is the addition of a pious redactor, as Spinoza seems to suggest, then Solomon has only one opinion by the natural light: he believes in the mortality of the soul.

Some scholars conjecture that the twenty-three-year-old Spinoza was expelled from the synagogue for denying the immortality of the soul, and some argue that the early chapters of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* are reworked from a polemic the young Spinoza addressed to members of his community.¹⁹ The natural knowledge of Solomon presented in chapter 1 fits with these speculations.

After praising Solomon's "divine" knowledge, which appears to be the common-sense opinion that the soul is mortal, Spinoza underlines the limits of Solomon's knowledge. Now Solomon excels others in "wisdom" (*sapientia*) rather than science (*scientia*) (2.1.2, 17).²⁰ None familiar with the wise

¹⁸ Hobbes, well-known to some of Spinoza's correspondents, uses Ecclesiastes 3:19 to argue both that souls are dead until raised at the Second Coming and that there is no immortal soul by nature, but by grace alone. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994), 4.44.24, 424–25.

¹⁹ Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's Heresy: Immortality and the Jewish Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 123 and 176. Piet Steenbakkers, "The text of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico Politicus*," in Melamed and Rosenthal, *Spinoza's Theologico-Political Treatise*, 29–40, 31. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 164.

²⁰ Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 112.

man (*sapiens*) at the conclusion of the last part of the *Ethics* (who is free by knowing the causes of things) will automatically assume Spinoza is downgrading Solomon’s science to “mere” wisdom. However, Spinoza underlines how Solomon’s geometrical knowledge does not surpass that of the vulgar. Evidence comes from the dimensions of the Molten Sea, the basin in which the priests of the temple make ablutions, in 1 Kings 7:23. Spinoza argues, “For since we are not bound to believe that Solomon was a Mathematician, we are permitted to affirm that he was ignorant of the ratio between the circumference and diameter of a circle, and like vulgar workmen deemed that it was 3 to 1” (2.8.9, 24). “By Hercules,” Spinoza swears, if we cannot understand that Solomon erroneously thought $\pi = 3$, he does not know “what we can understand from Scripture!” (2.8.10, 24). After inserting this commonplace exclamation from the Roman comic playwright Terence, Spinoza quotes a famous line from Terence’s *The Self-Tormentor* to assure his readers that his critique of Solomon’s mathematical knowledge is not impious: all the prophets including Solomon were mere humans, so “nothing human was alien to them” (2.8.11, 24).²¹ All humans err.

Now poking fun at his lack of mathematical knowledge, Spinoza calls Solomon a prophet for the first time. This raises a problem, since Spinoza argues in the previous chapter, “though natural science is divine, its propagators [*propagatores*] still cannot be called Prophets” (1.3.3, 2).²² Yet one need not conclude therefrom that Solomon cannot be a prophet, since he may not propagate his natural knowledge. Ecclesiastes warns its reader over and over against seeking natural knowledge.

In the appendix to the first part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza argues that mathematics habituates the mind to understand essences and properties rather than imagining ends: “the truth might have evaded mankind forever had not Mathematics, which is concerned not with ends but only with the essences and properties of figures, revealed to men a different standard of truth.”²³ Importantly, however, Spinoza indicates there are other causes of knowledge, though there is “no need to mention them.” The natural light may be one of these unmentioned causes of knowledge; Solomon’s common-sense denial of the immortal soul is no vulgar opinion in his time, but it also requires no

²¹ For my account of how and why Spinoza uses Terence as a rhetorical model for philosophical communication, see Robert Wyllie, “Staying Positive: Spinoza’s Terentian Rhetoric,” *Rhetorica* 41, no. 1 (2023): 61–87.

²² Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 80.

²³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, Appendix to the First Part, 1:441.

mathematical education. Strauss's argument that Solomon can only have had "popular wisdom" because "philosophy, as Spinoza conceives it, presupposes the knowledge of mathematics" is put too strongly.²⁴ To understand Solomon's failure to live philosophically, that is, to live by the natural light alone (13.1.6, 156), we should follow Robert Misrahi and see Solomon—at least at some point—as "a philosopher who endeavors to understand."²⁵

Wishful imagination and malice account for many failures to think philosophically in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. These passions are the pitfalls of common sense. Spinoza argues, for example, that out of "envy and a mean spirit," we imagine that our own good fortune depends on others' misfortune, and this is how we justify harming or depriving others (3.1.1, 31). The prophets must accommodate the idea of God to the vulgar, who on account of these emotions imagine they are locked in zero-sum games with rivals. Philosophy cannot abide a jealous God with a special love of Israel (e.g., 3.1.4, 31); precisely here, Franz Rosenzweig argues, Spinoza denies the possibility of Jewish philosophy.²⁶ Spinoza lambastes the "ancients, whose malice profaned God's ark, the temple, the law, and everything sacred" (12.2.14, 150). Yet Spinoza does not deny the possibility of ancient philosophy altogether. Some ancients, of course, possess geometrical knowledge: Euclid's teachings are clear and simple, independent of authorial intention, Spinoza writes, and "understandable in the greatest degree...in whatever language" (7.11.9, 96). In a 1674 letter, Spinoza criticizes Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle for imagining "trifles...to lessen the authority of Democritus, whose good reputation they so envied that they had all his books burned."²⁷ Since Democritus was known for his contributions to geometry, Spinoza at least raises the possibility of ancient philosophers who wrote in a geometric manner. If this suggests a lost ancient philosophy in *more geometrico*, it would indicate a more elaborate historical story about ancient philosophy present in Spinoza's writing and thinking beyond the *Theologico-Political Treatise*.

Solomon is no successful philosopher-king for Spinoza. Spinoza never mentions Solomon's institutional reforms in 1 Kings 4:3–19, like

²⁴ Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 172.

²⁵ Misrahi, "Spinoza and Christian Thought," 416; Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, 128 and 157.

²⁶ Strauss, "Preface to *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*," 238. See Michael P. Zuckert and Catherine H. Zuckert, *Leo Strauss and the Problem of Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 254–88.

²⁷ Benedict Spinoza, Letter 56, to Boxel, in *Collected Works of Spinoza*, 2:423. Curley notes correctly that Spinoza's probable source here, Diogenes Laertius, records only that Plato wished to destroy the books. See also Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 152.

administrative councils or regional governors that were meant to counteract the intermediary power of the twelve tribes.²⁸ Spinoza does not even mention Solomon’s self-description at 1 Kings 3:9 of the “understanding heart” God gives him to judge political matters well. Hobbes cites this thrice.²⁹ Spinoza instead inclines towards Niccolò Machiavelli’s dimmer view of a Solomon who has the good “fortune” not to lose his kingdom but lacks the “virtue” to preserve it for his son.³⁰

Spinoza’s Solomon is a cautionary tale of philosophical hubris. Spinoza argues that Solomon’s superior natural knowledge leads him to disparage the Law:

And there is no one in the Old Testament who has spoken of God more reasonably than Solomon, who surpassed everyone of his age in the natural light. And therefore he figured he was above the Law as well (for it was only handed down by those who lacked reason and the lessons of human understanding); and he gave little weight to all the laws that have to do with the king and which consisted mainly of three (see Dt. 17:16–17). Indeed, he plainly violated them (in which he erred, however, and did what is not worthy of a Philosopher; namely, he indulged in pleasures. He taught that all goods of fortune are vain for mortals (see Eccles.), that human beings have nothing more outstanding than understanding, and that they are punished by no greater comeuppance than foolishness (see Prov. 16:22). (2.9.28, 28)

The law regarding kingship in Deuteronomy 17:16–17 forbids the king from amassing too many horses, too many wives, and too much gold and silver. Yet Solomon could not have known this particular law, according to Spinoza, because it is only written centuries later by Ezra, who conveniently has hindsight about what destroyed Solomon’s kingdom (8.1.80, 111). This is the clearest indication that Spinoza is engaging in historical fiction when it comes to the figure of Solomon, and constructing a story that cannot be true according to his historical criticism.

Of the three prohibitions in the Deuteronomic law of kingship, which warn against overindulgence in military glory, in sexual pleasure, and in wealth, Spinoza criticizes Solomon only for yielding to sexual pleasure.

²⁸ See Oliver O’Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 58–59.

²⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan* 2.20.16, 133; and *De cive* 11, 238 and 12, 244, in *Man and Citizen*, trans. Bernard Gert (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1991).

³⁰ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1.19.2, 52.

Solomon does not indulge in military glory. Unlike every other Hebrew king, Spinoza argues that Solomon is a pacific king who believes that “virtue—being wisdom—could be established better in peace than in war” (18.3.5, 214). And while Solomon amasses vast wealth, Spinoza never criticizes him for disparaging the Law in this regard.³¹ Spinoza only criticizes Solomon for collecting seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines in 1 Kings 11:3. And he does not write that Solomon behaves imprudently for a king, but rather “unworthily of a Philosopher” (2.9.28, 28). This suggests that a precept against luxuriating in sexual pleasure is knowable by the natural light, though Solomon disdains it because it happens also to be taught by the prophets and their Law. Years later in the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza argues that Solomon’s marriage to pharaoh’s daughter leads to the disastrous war between his son Rehoboam and Shishak.³² Yet even if Solomon’s sexual desires do not directly lead the United Monarchy to ruin, it is clear that Spinoza disdains them. This may shed some light on why the Song of Songs is the only book of the Hebrew Bible that is never mentioned in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*.

2. SOLOMON’S FOUR PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES

Spinoza describes four doctrines of Solomon’s natural knowledge. Taken together, they have internal contradictions, as well as conclusions that are as bleak as his reflections on the mortality of the soul. Immediately after linking Solomon’s knowledge to his contempt for the Law and ultimately to the downfall of the United Monarchy, Spinoza lists three things Solomon “teaches” (*docet*) (4.4.38, 51 and 4.4.42, 51).³³ It is not clear whom Solomon teaches in Proverbs; he may try and fail to teach the Hebrew people to love wisdom and science. The first two doctrines are from Ecclesiastes, without specific citation, and the third is derived from Proverbs 16:22:

1. All goods of fortune are vain for mortals
2. Human beings have nothing more excellent than understanding
3. Human beings are punished only by their foolishness

³¹ The lacuna regarding wealth in this critique of pleasure, honor, and wealth may have a parallel in the early *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, where Spinoza describes his own renunciation of pleasure, honor, and wealth to take up philosophy. Pleasure is always followed by sadness, honor requires directing our conduct to please others’ understanding, but there is no specific drawback to wealth. This deserves more attention than can be given here. Spinoza, *Collected Works*, 1:8.

³² Benedict Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2000), 7.24, 88. On Solomon’s marriage as a sign of pharaoh’s regard for him, see O’Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 67.

³³ Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 202.

The first doctrine, or vanity doctrine, is that human beings are “ignorant” of the “means for living securely and preserving the body” (3.4.3, 33). In the first place, Solomon teaches, it is vain to acquire security and health because we die. In the second place, it is vain to acquire the means for security and bodily preservation, because we are ignorant of their causes. These limits to knowledge make it difficult to understand why we should seek wisdom or science. Solomon seems to make the Hebrews’ ignorance of natural causes manifest to them (see 1.3.8, 2). Here, however, Spinoza must think that mathematical precision can improve upon Solomon’s common-sense natural knowledge.

Solomon’s second doctrine is that the understanding is excellent, outstanding above all goods of fortune, and the third doctrine is its promise: knowledge can preserve us from the consequences of folly. This doctrine is already undermined by the vanity doctrine: we seek the knowledge to preserve ourselves from folly in vain. There is no formal contradiction. Knowledge of the causes of security and self-preservation would save us from our folly; however, we lack such knowledge. Therefore, we are unable to overcome the punitive consequences of our folly. Spinoza omits the word “fools” in Proverbs 16:22 when he lists the third of Solomon’s doctrines: not fools but *human beings* are punished for their foolishness. Taken together as a dismal whole, Solomon’s three doctrines undermine the prophets; there is no Law or moral teaching we can know by which the obedient are rewarded and the disobedient are punished.³⁴

It would seem imprudent for Solomon to teach his subjects that there is no reward for virtue and obedience, and furthermore that all his own efforts to preserve the United Monarchy in peace are vain in a world governed by inscrutable vicissitudes of fortune. In his gloss on 1 Kings 3:12, Spinoza argues that “a prudent king would not give fewer thanks” for surpassing wisdom “even if God had said that he would grant the same wisdom to all” (3.1.5. 31–32). Solomon may not be a prudent king.³⁵ Yet a prudent king would

³⁴ Solomon has good reason to warn his reader “those who increase in knowledge increase sorrow” (Eccles. 1:18). This verse is never referred to in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, but it is the only reference to Solomon in the *Ethics*. Spinoza claims the verse teaches that “it is necessary to come to know both our nature’s power and its lack of power, so that we can determine what reason can do in moderating the affects, and what it cannot do” (*Ethics*, 4.P17S, 1:555). However, later in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, Spinoza argues that the beginning and the end of Ecclesiastes are salutary interpolations (10.1.12, 130 and 10.2.57, 138).

³⁵ For an identification of Solomon with the prudent king, see Bagley, *Philosophy, Theology, and Politics*, 66n113.

likely not disseminate the dismal vanity doctrine. Solomon has no reason to be thankful to God for self-awareness about his own invincible ignorance. Indeed, he cannot thank God *less*.

The philosophy of Solomon is divided into two books, however. Proverbs only teaches that knowledge is excellent and that fools are punished by folly; only Ecclesiastes teaches the vanity of seeking knowledge of external causes. In his extended commentary in chapter 4, Spinoza argues that Proverbs shows the compatibility between “natural divine light and law” (4.4.50, 53). Spinoza argues here that “most” of Solomon’s proverbs “confirm our opinion as clearly as possible,” citing for example Proverbs 2:3, where those who “cry out for prudence” understand both fear of God and science (4.4.40, 51). Science flows from the mouth of God, in Proverbs 2:9, and “this science contains the true Ethics and Politics, and they are deduced from it: Then you will understand Justice and judgment and righteousness (and) every good path” (4.4.43, 51; cf. 5.1.20, 57). The intellect or understanding is morally outstanding, Spinoza thinks, mentioning “Solomon’s tenet” that the “wise alone live with a pacified and steadfast spirit” (4.4.40, 51). In this way, Spinoza can argue that for Solomon “human understanding is the source of true life” (4.4.35, 50). The wise alone are just judges of others, furthermore, because they are resolute in “the steadfast and perpetual will to give another his right” (4.1.2, 44). This moral reinterpretation grounds the excellence-of-the-intellect doctrine in the punitive-folly doctrine: there is “misfortune in foolishness alone” (4.4.35, 50). The intellect is outstanding because the wise can learn the causes of foolishness and avoid it. Spinoza and Solomon agree that tranquility “depends in the greatest degree not on the imperium of fortune (that is, on God’s external help), but on one’s own internal virtue (or God’s internal help): namely, since by watching, acting, and consulting well, one preserves oneself to the greatest degree” (4.4.45, 52). One’s internal power to remain steadfast, therefore, depends upon whether one can learn the causes of things by observation and consultation. Spinoza shows that Proverbs harmonizes science and the Law, teaches the wise to be just, and lays a foundation for ethics and politics—at least by abstracting from the vanity doctrine of Ecclesiastes.

Solomon fails to ground the Law in true Ethics and Politics, indulges in pleasure at the height of his power, and ultimately ruins the United Monarchy. Solomon suffers the “slavery of the flesh, or an unsteadfast and vacillating spirit” (4.4.11, 47). Spinoza points out that Solomon is resigned to the impossibility of remaining steadfast in virtue: “Nobody is so equitable as to act well always and never sin (see Eccles. 7:20)” (3.5.34, 38). Perhaps it

is because Solomon cannot avoid folly and its punitive consequences that he cannot remain steadfast in virtue, and overindulges in sexual pleasure.

Spinoza calls Solomon “the Philosopher” for teaching that there is a fixed order of nature in Ecclesiastes. The seventh and final citation from this book in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* introduces a doctrine that Solomon “very clearly teaches” in Ecclesiastes 1:10:

4. “Nothing new happens in nature” (6.1.94, 80)

According to Spinoza, Ecclesiastes teaches “that nature keeps a fixed and unchangeable order, that God has been the same for all ages recognized and unrecognized by us, and that the laws of nature are therefore perfect...and, finally, that miracles do not seem to be anything new except on account of the ignorance of human beings” (6.1.95, 80). Solomon’s theological corollary denies local motion to God. What is a god, then?³⁶ God does not move or act in the world outside of the fixed laws of nature (15.1.35–37, 173); neither can God be moved (for instance, to anger or pity) by prayer. Solomon’s intuitions about the God-world relationship come close to Spinoza’s in some respects: Solomon’s God is not separate from the world, and human beings are not separate from God-or-world. The fixed order of nature is largely “unrecognized by us,” according to the vanity doctrine. In fact, the only aspect of this unchangeable order that Solomon recognizes, according to Spinoza, is that humans and animals alike are mortal. Spinoza cites Ecclesiastes 3:19 a second time—it is the only passage of Ecclesiastes cited twice—now alongside Ecclesiastes 9:2–3: the “same fate comes to all...to the good and the evil.”³⁷ Spinoza reminds his reader of the vanity doctrine, writing that Solomon “suspected that everything happens by chance” (6.1.41, 73). Chance is a fixed but unknown order in nature. Solomon may suspect that the natural order is unintelligible in principle or simply that human beings will never develop the scientific methods to surpass him in wisdom (3.1.5. 31). Either way, Ecclesiastes despairs of knowledge and dismantles the ethical and political foundations of Proverbs. Human beings are fools who cannot become wise to their follies in advance, and avoid them. There is only sorrow in wisdom.

Solomon intuits he is part of a fixed order he does not understand, except that it ends in death, and fails to live philosophically by indulging in pleasure.

³⁶ Meier mentions that Strauss considered making this question (*quid sit deus?*) the epigraph to his book *Socrates and Aristophanes*. Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 27.

³⁷ See Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 196.

Unlike Spinoza, he lacks the wherewithal or method to identify knowledge that is empowering or joyful. Strauss recognizes as a general pattern what Spinoza offers as the moral of the cautionary tale of Solomon that is sketched in outline in the background of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*: the premodern critic of religion lacks moral force and resolves into hedonism.³⁸

The background story of Solomon's moral and political failures suggests an interpretation of how Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are related. Spinoza never indicates a turning point in Solomon's story from the ambitions of Proverbs to unite science and the Law to the despond of Ecclesiastes, but he hints at several. Perhaps Solomon disparages the Law against luxuriating in sexual pleasure out of hubris. Perhaps his attempt to teach the Hebrews to love science and wisdom fails. Perhaps misfortunes befall the United Monarchy that he cannot understand. Or perhaps the inevitability of death and the immovability of God overwhelm Solomon with sadness. We are left to wonder why the one whom tradition holds to be the wisest man of all is a failed philosopher-king (see 3.1.5, 31). By whatever way, despite his surpassing wisdom, power, and wealth, and despite a thousand sexual partners, Solomon is led to despair. Without the mathematical training to measure things in their essence, the means for attaining security and self-preservation remain obscure to Solomon. He is left only with simple commonsensical but depressing insights into mortality and chance.

Spinoza suggests that Solomon is the lone philosopher among the ancient Hebrew writers because prosperity and security are the preconditions for the increase of knowledge. The Hebrews' kingdom is at its strongest when Solomon is writing (6.1.41–42, 73). The philosophical Gentile who authors Job, Spinoza conjectures, is not a man “suffering miserably among the ashes, but meditating at leisure in a library” (10.1.6, 132). Fearful and needy persons lack the leisure to philosophize. In the Preface, Spinoza writes that superstition, the “hallucinations of a sad and fearful psyche,” most troubles unstable political realms (P.1.8, xvii). The powerful and fortunate Solomon, who has no need for imaginative consolation, is free to philosophize. Spinoza may think it is a general rule that, among the ancients, powerful rulers—a Marcus Aurelius, for example³⁹—have the leisure to question opinions about the laws. The philosopher-king is in a tenuous position, however, if he is first to understand “the highest secret of a monarchical regime” that religious fear is

³⁸ Strauss, “Preface to *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*,” 255–56.

³⁹ DeBrabander argues Spinoza's Solomon is made to resemble the Stoic emperor. Firmin DeBrabander, *Spinoza and the Stoics: Power, Politics, and the Passions* (London: Continuum, 2007), 114.

necessary to keep his subjects in thrall (P.3.1, xvii). If philosophy undermines the foundation of monarchy, then it must remain a royal secret.

3. HOW PHILOSOPHY WAS INCLUDED IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

Spinoza argues that the Hebrew Bible is largely devoid of philosophy, rejecting Maimonides’s reading of the scriptures. Using the “Solomonic” language of Proverbs 25:11, Maimonides describes the search for a philosophical “apple of gold” *within* the Hebrew Bible’s exoteric “settings of silver” that are proper instruction of the “welfare of human societies.”⁴⁰ Spinoza argues that “almost” (*fere*) nothing in scripture can be deduced by the natural light (7.11.26, 98).⁴¹ He emphasizes this *almost*, “For we do not mean to state absolutely that nothing that is part of theory alone is pertinent to the teaching of Scripture” (13.1.4, 156). The fixed order of nature, the excellence of the intellect, the comeuppance of folly, and the mortality of the soul, the simple principles that Solomon derives from his natural light—indeed, “no secrets of Philosophy” are revealed as if by “a light above the natural light” (3.1.1 and 3.1.5, 155–56). Even the vanity principle is true *for Solomon*, since any who lack the mathematical training to measure the essence of natural causes cannot understand the comeuppance of their folly. Furthermore, no amount of philosophical understanding will undo the penalty of death. Spinoza adverts to Mark 10:21 to declare that observing the Law of the Hebrew Bible is not enough for “eternal life” (Annotation 5 to 3.5.5, 240). Yet Christ in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* is never said to have the truth of eternal life, and readers must look to Spinoza’s famously vexing treatment of the subject in the final twenty-two propositions of the *Ethics*.⁴²

According to Spinoza, the Pharisees who compile the Hebrew Bible oppose including Solomon’s philosophy. Spinoza describes the Pharisees as the party of rabbis that is particularly concerned with defending “the resurrection of the dead” (10.2.56, 137–38). Spinoza selectively cites the Babylonian Talmud to dramatize their attempt to exclude Solomon:

⁴⁰ Moses Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 1:12. For a more complete description of the stakes of this argument between Spinoza’s defense of equality and Maimonidean veneration, see Joshua Parens, *Maimonides and Spinoza: Their Conflicting Accounts of Human Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 53–54.

⁴¹ Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 316.

⁴² For a nuanced close reading of Spinoza’s rejection of personal immortality that nonetheless retains a notion of union with God and personal transformation, see Claire Carlisle, *Spinoza’s Religion: A New Reading of the “Ethics”* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), 148ff.

I cannot be silent about the audacity of the Rabbis, who wanted to exclude this book [Proverbs] with Ecclesiastes from the canon of Sacred ones and keep it with the rest we now lack. This they absolutely would have done, if they had not found passages where the law of Moses is commended. Surely it is to be lamented that matters that are sacred and best would depend on their choice. Still, I am grateful to them that they wanted to communicate these books to us as well; but I cannot help doubting whether they handed them down in good faith: I do not want to put this to a severe examination here. (10.1.9–12, 130)

Proverbs and Ecclesiastes may, like Kings, be excerpts from the “the books of affairs of Solomon” (8.1.71, 110). What does Spinoza mean that these two books are handed down in bad faith? He presently returns to them:

Namely it says in *Tractate Shabbat*, chapter 2, folio 30, page 2, ‘Rabbi Judah said in the name of Rav: The experts sought to hide the book of Ecclesiastes, since its words conflicted with the words of the law (n.b., with the book of the law of Moses). Why, moreover, did they not hide it? Since it begins in accordance with the law and ends with accordance with the law.’ And a little later on, ‘And they also sought to hide the Book of Proverbs, etc.’ (10.2.57–58, 138)

Spinoza claims Ecclesiastes is canonized because it accords with the Law, at least at the beginning and the end.⁴³ Yet Spinoza puts the authenticity of the beginning and the end in question. Proverbs contradicts the Law when Solomon argues that human beings are not punished for disobedience to the law, but instead, fools merely suffer their follies. Yet since this promises to reinforce the law, perhaps, the “men of Hezekiah copied out” these proverbs (10.1.8, 129–30). Spinoza would have known that the Talmud ascribes authorship of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs to Hezekiah and his colleagues.⁴⁴ Spinoza never questions their authorship. He never mentions Song of Songs, even though it is frequently linked with Ecclesiastes in the Talmudic sources that Spinoza cites. One likely reason for the strangely coy way with which Spinoza treats the writings traditionally ascribed to Solomon, I hope to have shown, is that he has constructed a cautionary tale

⁴³ In 1783, Spinoza’s great admirer J. G. Herder argues that only its ascription to Solomon can account for the canonization of the erotic Song of Songs. J. G. Herder, *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, trans. James Marsh, 2 vols. (Burlington, VT: Edward Smith, 1833), 291.

⁴⁴ Hezekiah and his colleagues are identified as compilers in Proverbs 25:1, but the Talmud (Bava Batra 15a) calls them authors. See Curley’s note in *Collected Works of Spinoza*, 2:227n9. Spinoza mentions the Talmudic argument that Hezekiah’s son, the benign Nehemiah, likewise preserves the book of Ezekiel, despite tensions with the Law (10.2.59, 138). Spinoza later twice cites Ezekiel 20:25 as a criticism that the Law of Moses contains curses, because God has punished the people by giving them bad laws (17.12.32, 207 and 17.12.41, 208).

of an ancient philosopher-king who lacks mathematical knowledge in the background of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, and he wants to preserve its plausibility.

4. SPINOZA’S (RE-)EVALUATION OF SOLOMON

Spinoza rehabilitates Solomon in the final five chapters of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, which are devoted not to separating philosophy from theology, but to considering the “foundations of the Republic” (16.1.3, 179). Spinoza has already indicated Solomon’s popularity, describing how “the populace embraced” the tenets of Solomon “as equally holy” (4.4.34, 50). Now Spinoza suggests the reason for Solomon’s popularity: the Hebrews associate his rule with the peace and prosperity of their kingdom (18.3.5, 214). For Strauss, this is a third strike against Solomon the philosopher (after, first, his lack of mathematical knowledge and, second, his indulgence in pleasure), because the Hebrews despise “the science common to everyone” (1.20.4, 13).⁴⁵ However, Solomon seems to be popular not qua philosopher, but qua king. The Hebrews may make appeals to authority, embracing the reputed wisdom of their king without understanding it. If they persevere in piety up to the reign of Solomon, but not after, it is not necessarily the direct result of Solomon’s philosophical doctrines. Instead, their loss of faith may stem from the malaise and despair of a people dispossessed of a great kingdom for reasons nobody, including their wise ruler, understands, and who then begin looking for new superstitions (11.1.16, 140 and 12.2.8, 149; cf. 19.3.15, 228).

The rehabilitation of Solomon is clear when Spinoza refers to him to ground his own political science of natural right. In this context, Spinoza is deriving a Hobbesian equivalence between sins and violations of civil law, and his own equivalence between right and power. It requires him to deny natural justice. Since everyone has the right to do whatever they can, Spinoza argues, it is impossible to “conceive sin in the natural state...[since] everything is borne with in accordance with the laws common to nature as such, and (if I might speak with Solomon) the same fate happens to the just and impious” (19.1.8, 220). Spinoza restates the vanity doctrine from Ecclesiastes 9:7 that the just and the unjust come to the same fate. He speaks with Solomon a second time to argue that “no traces of divine justice are found except when just men rule” (19.1.20, 222). And Spinoza speaks with Solomon a third time to make the distinctly un-Hobbesian argument that anyone powerful

⁴⁵ Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 172–73.

enough to topple a tyrant may do so, if God (i.e., superior power) is with him, otherwise Solomon's double injunction to "fear God and the king" would be impious (19.2.15, 224). Why does Spinoza "speak with Solomon" three times to ground ethics and politics in natural right or power, if Solomon is a failure? Furthermore, how can Spinoza invoke what I have called the vanity doctrine, on which founders Solomon's own attempt to ground politics in Proverbs?

Solomon's vanity doctrine is no longer a vanity doctrine when Spinoza ratifies it in chapter 19 when he describes the basis of right. Though the *Theologico-Political Treatise* is silent about why Spinoza rehabilitates Solomon, it is not difficult to infer. Solomon lacks the scientific knowledge to understand the causes of peace and bodily preservation that are the foundations of ethics and politics, regarding them as "goods of fortune." Solomon likewise lacks the mathematical tools to acquire this knowledge. Spinoza rejects half of the vanity doctrine; he will argue that modern philosophy understands the causes of security and bodily preservation. These causes are issued not by chance, but by regular laws that Spinoza thinks can be increasingly understood. Understanding these laws of security and preservation will increase the power, or natural right, of the imperium. This resolves Solomon's apparent contradictions and the dismal conclusions of the vanity doctrine. With new scientific knowledge available, Spinoza will be able to argue that philosophical knowledge is empowering and causes joy.⁴⁶ Religion need no longer be a tool of fear and manipulation, the highest secret of monarchy. Now, instead, philosophy can be the basis of a steadfast moral life for all, and a public thing, the basis for the peace and prosperity of the republic.

Yet the first part of Solomon's vanity doctrine, that preservation is vain for mortals, is a more profound problem that remains a thorny issue. Spinoza may quietly endorse the mortality of the soul when "he speak[s] with Solomon" in his oblique reference to Ecclesiastes 3:19 and 9:7 and "the same fate of all" (19.1.8, 220). Spinoza writes very little on this subject, and his cryptic proposition in the *Ethics* on the matter—"The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the Body, but something of it remains which is eternal"⁴⁷—is a matter of no little debate. It may be true, as Strauss suggests, that Spinoza is more forthcoming on his atheism, or in this case on denying the immortality of the soul, in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* than he is in

⁴⁶ Empowerment and enjoyment are closely related for Spinoza, for whom bodies affectively register empowerment, and the mind's prospect of empowerment, as joy (*Ethics*, 3.P11S, 1:500–501).

⁴⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5.P23, 1:607.

the *Ethics*.⁴⁸ In general, Spinoza is much more guarded than Solomon when it comes to openly questioning personal immortality. He replies sharply in a 1665 letter to a Cartesian critic on this point, for example: “I do not thank you for attributing to me the things you want to draw from my letter. What occasion did my letter give you for ascribing these opinions to me: that men are like beasts, that men die and perish as beasts do?”⁴⁹ Does the knowledge of death and decomposition threaten to leave us downcast, as it does Solomon, and even cause to founder our efforts to live justly, as it does Solomon’s? The question hangs over Spinoza’s writings with no clear answer. He advises us to change the subject to more joyful matters.

Spinoza’s *Theologico-Political Treatise* discusses Solomon’s philosophical doctrines, their apparent contradictions, his failure to live according to them, and the disastrous results of this failure for the United Monarchy. Solomon intuits the fixed order of nature but does not understand its laws, save one. Everything but eventual death appears to be by chance. Without the mathematical means to measure and determine the causes of empowerment, and to guarantee security and self-preservation, Solomon tries in vain to understand God and the world. Philosophy causes Solomon sorrow rather than joy; he abandons it at some point for a life of pleasure. The cautionary tale of Solomon’s philosophical failure in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* suggests the ways that Spinoza thinks he can at last fulfill ancient philosophy’s proverbial promise to politics.

⁴⁸ Strauss suggests the possibility that Spinoza’s atheism can be found in the more exoteric *Theologico-Political Treatise*, since it “could not with propriety be disclosed in the *Ethics*” (*Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 189).

⁴⁹ Spinoza, Letter 21, in *Collected Works*, 1:376. Jonathan Israel, “Early Dutch and German Reaction,” 89. See also Strauss, *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*, 276n27.

Montaigne and the Theological-Political Problem

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Abstract: This essay argues that Montaigne proposes three solutions to the theological-political problem: (1) civil religion, (2) the privatization of religion, and (3) the separation of the religious from the mundane. I contend with two lines of interpretation: one that presents a “Christian Montaigne” who is deeply conventional regarding religion, and another that presents an “antireligious Montaigne” who aims at initiating a radical enlightenment. I argue that the former underestimates how radically Montaigne reflects on the tension between religion, politics, and human reason as a philosopher, while the latter underestimates Montaigne’s seriousness in his critique of human reason. Precisely because Montaigne is radical in philosophizing, he does not initiate radical enlightenment or envision a society or civilization without religion. Instead, he proposes moderate solutions to the theological-political problem, taking into consideration the necessity of civil peace and order, the ordinary people’s need for religion, and the fundamental limitation of human reason.

1. CHRISTIAN MONTAIGNE, ANTIRELIGIOUS MONTAIGNE, OR MODERATE MONTAIGNE

A. CHRISTIAN MONTAIGNE

Montaigne’s assertions about his Catholic faith and his apparently conservative deference to authority and mores have prompted some scholars to take him to be a loyal Christian with no plans to significantly reform existing religious institutions and their relationship with civil government.¹ Moreover, his arguments for the compatibility between his skepticism and faith based solely on grace have reassured some readers that even his philosophy

¹ Philippe Desan, *Montaigne: A Life*, trans. Steven Rendall and Lisa Neal (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

is congruent with his conventional outlook.² Indeed, according to Richard Popkin, the use of skepticism for the promotion of Christian fideism itself was traditional in the Renaissance.

Yet there is ample evidence that Montaigne does not take the Christianity of his time for granted, either as a conventional gentleman or an unreflective believer. He criticizes the cruelty of Christian asceticism,³ the divisive fanaticism among European Christians,⁴ and the “pious cruelty” perpetrated against the native Americans in the New World.⁵ Montaigne is acutely aware of the problems of Christian ethics and especially of Christian politics. His radical reflections on the relationship between and among the Christian religion, politics, and human reason, which call into question the Christian religion of his time, carry implications for a new order.

B. SCHAEFER’S ANTIRELIGIOUS MONTAIGNE

I also question David Schaefer’s argument that Montaigne initiates a radically antireligious enlightenment as a solution to the problem of Christian politics.⁶ While those who find a “Christian Montaigne” in the *Essays* underestimate the extent to which Montaigne is a philosopher (i.e., one whose qualified support for convention is not conventional but philosophical), Schaefer’s antireligious reading underestimates the seriousness of Montaigne’s skeptical critique of human reason and defense of convention.

Taking as his cue Montaigne’s remark in the “Apology” that all philosophies are skeptical at their core, Schaefer reads Montaigne’s skepticism as essentially no different from Socratic knowledge of ignorance, or from any genuine, nondogmatic philosophy. He therefore takes Montaigne’s skepticism as representative of philosophy in the sense of the quest for wisdom. By showing an apparent compatibility and even mutual accommodation

² Donald Frame, *Montaigne’s Discovery of Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 58; Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 44–63; J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 46.

³ See Michel de Montaigne, “On Moderation,” “On Cruelty,” and “On Virtue,” in *The Complete Essays*, trans. M. Sreech (London: Penguin Books, 2004). In what follows, references to the *Essays* will be to page of this edition.

⁴ See the introduction and the response to the first critique of Sebond in “An Apology for Raymond Sebond.”

⁵ See “On the Cannibals,” “On Coaches.”

⁶ David Lewis Schaefer, *The Political Philosophy of Montaigne* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990). For Schaefer’s discussion of Montaigne’s skepticism, see esp. 73–87.

between faith and skepticism, and thereby encouraging not only toleration but even the promotion of skepticism by religious authorities, Montaigne is really sneaking in a Trojan horse to undermine traditional religious authorities, Schaefer argues.⁷ That said, in his interpretation of the later part of the “Apology,” Schaefer (rightly, in my view) identifies a distinctive aspect of Montaigne’s skepticism, namely, its separation of human subjective experience from the essence of things. He goes on to argue that this skepticism allows Montaigne to initiate the Baconian program of modern natural science, with its goal of mastering nature and its means of methodically analyzing experience.⁸ Ultimately, Schaefer argues, Montaigne aims at persuading the multitude and their government to protect and foster philosophic inquiry, which improves the conditions of life, and thereby at bringing into being a liberal and secular society.

Textually, Schaefer’s interpretation of Montaigne as a precursor to Bacon depends in part on a reading of Montaigne’s critique of the empiricist Theophrastus and the Academic theory of “probability.” Schaefer writes that, in the relevant passage, Montaigne “suggest[s] the possibility of infinite advancement in the arts and sciences.”⁹ And yet, a closer inspection of the text shows this to be Montaigne’s report of the opinion of some “conciliatory men,” rather than Montaigne’s own suggestion.¹⁰ Indeed, Montaigne goes on to criticize this vision of scientific progress based on “the assays of experience.”¹¹ Schaefer’s discounting of the sincerity of Montaigne’s critique is questionable in this case, because Montaigne’s arguments against empiricism and probability here are elaborated and philosophically sound. Montaigne argues that if we can only reach “probabilities” because of the uncertainty inherent in “our intellectual faculties and our senses,” then “it is pointless to allow our judgment to be influenced by their operation.”¹² This is the logic of Montaigne’s argument: the object of a judgment can only be probabilities yielded by the operation of our faculties; because we can judge only with our faculties, which yield only probabilities, a judgment (rightly construed) would take the form, “it is probable that it is probable that. . .” The probability

⁷ Ibid., 82.

⁸ Ibid., 114–33.

⁹ Ibid., 115.

¹⁰ Montaigne, *Essays*, 631.

¹¹ “But if man admits, like Theophrastus, that he has no knowledge of first causes and principles, then let him boldly give up all the rest of his knowledge” (ibid., 632).

¹² Ibid., 633.

would thus diminish infinitely and become meaningless. This line of reasoning thus anticipates Hume's famous argument in *A Treatise of Human Nature* 1.4.1.¹³ We can hardly regard such a powerful argument as mere rhetoric.

There is also a tension between Schaefer's interpretations of Montaigne's skepticism as a nondogmatic quest for wisdom and simultaneously the philosophical ground of Baconian science. As Schaefer himself emphasizes, the latter contains definite, that is, dogmatic, answers to some of the most important philosophical questions, such as whether transcendent longings or earthly desires enjoy priority in human nature and whether truth has independent value or only has value insofar as it serves human utility.

More importantly, the Baconian use of reason allows human beings, as Schaefer puts it, to "take the place of God in another sense, by achieving the creative power that the Bible attributes to the Deity."¹⁴ And yet, surely such a view of reason is hardly less "presumptuous" than the ancient view of reason as the access to the ultimate truth. Just as Montaigne witnessed how the ancient presumption of reason, ingrained in Christian rational theology, lent itself to the justification of physical cruelty against the native Americans in the New World, on the grounds that this was a beneficial dominance exercised by rational people over "natural slaves,"¹⁵ it would have been easy for Montaigne to see the danger of a nature-mastering, godlike reason justifying "tutelage" over underdeveloped nations. Indeed, right after his refutation of the empiricists' vision of the infinite advancement of science, Montaigne says, "whatever people preach to us and whatever we may learn from them, never forget that the giver is a man and so is the taker."¹⁶ Montaigne is obviously concerned with preventing domination based on claims to truth, or for that matter, to having reached an advanced state in science.

¹³ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. D. F. Norton and M. J. Norton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 121–25.

¹⁴ Schaefer, *Political Philosophy of Montaigne*, 126. There is indeed such an ambition in Bacon as he seeks to rise above the thing "relative to man" (*in ordine ad hominem*) to reach the form "relative to the universe" (*in ordine ad universum*), and hence to get rid of "the idols of the human mind" (*humanae Mentis Idola*) and discover "the ideas of the divine mind" (*divinae Mentis Ideas*). Bacon, *Novum Organum*, ed. Graham Rees and Maria Wakely (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 236–37, 186–87. The question is whether Montaigne could share the hope or desire to reach *divinae Mentis Ideas*.

¹⁵ One influential justification for Spanish cruelty against the native Americans, represented by Spanish humanist theologian Sepúlveda, is their lack of rational capacity and therefore their status as "natural slaves." See Ángel Losada, "The Controversy between Sepúlveda and Las Casas in the Junta of Valladolid," in *Bartolomé de las Casas in History*, ed. Juan Friede and Benjamin Keen (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1971), 279–307.

¹⁶ Montaigne, *Essays*, 634–35.

Schaefer's Baconian interpretation of Montaigne accordingly faces textual and theoretical difficulties. His further argument, that Montaigne reconciles the unphilosophic multitude and their government to philosophic inquiry in the form of modern science, which improves their life conditions and rids them of their need for religion, is thus, in my view, correspondingly weakened. Montaigne does not have a Baconian project, and a fortiori he does not solve the problem of religion and politics with it. Antireligious enlightenment is not Montaigne's solution to the theological-political problem.

Though Montaigne recognizes the problems caused by religion, he does not envision a society without religion appearing at any point in the future. While some of Montaigne's conservative statements might serve as a veneer hiding his innovative and controversial ideas, this also means, as Schaefer concedes, that he does not aim at immediately overthrowing the conventional institutions of his time. *Pace* Schaefer, I argue that Montaigne does not envision an enlightened and atheistic society arising even in the long term, as he is radically realistic in evaluating the human condition and fundamentally moderate in recognizing the scope of possibility of human politics. Montaigne sees religion as an anthropological phenomenon; furthermore, as he notes, "all polities have a god at their head."¹⁷ Montaigne agrees with Plato that it is "difficult to fix it [atheism] firmly in the human spirit," as most people "are not strong enough to do so."¹⁸ The ordinary people, who are the vast majority, need religion.

C. LEVINE'S MODERATE MONTAIGNE

Alan Levine's reading reconciles, to some extent, the two lines of interpretation above. Drawing on Montaigne's distinction between merely human religion and a "purer kind" of faith that is "divinely inspired" through "extraordinary infusion," he argues that Montaigne proposes the prudent preservation of merely human religion for the sake of political stability, inasmuch as its undermining means undermining political society's foundation in opinion.¹⁹ Regarding the "purer kind" of faith, Levine, following Schaefer, insists that, in the light of Montaigne's exposure of the instability of the Christians' belief and their moral corruption in his time, "Montaigne denies that faith is ever held on the basis of an 'extraordinary infusion.'" Similarly,

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 716.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 498.

¹⁹ Alan Levine, *Sensual Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 43–52.

he argues that even “if Montaigne says that fideism is the most divine position for human beings to hold, he also argues that there are no—and have never been—human beings who believe on such a divinely inspired basis.”²⁰ Despite Levine’s emphatical repetition of this conclusion, his careful phrasing nevertheless shows that the historical and empirical observation that there “have never been” humans possessing a “divinely inspired” genuine faith cannot rule this out as a theoretical possibility.²¹

I agree with Schaefer and Levine that Montaigne reflects radically on the theological-political problem and is very concerned with mitigating the disturbing effects of religion on politics. Moreover, I agree with Levine that Montaigne’s approach to this task is moderate in the sense of recognizing ordinary people’s need for religion. And yet, despite the persuasiveness of his analysis, Levine does not elaborate on Montaigne’s specific solutions. The contribution of the present essay, therefore, is to present Montaigne’s specific proposals on how to mitigate the disturbing effects of religion on politics.

I argue that Montaigne assays three solutions to the theological-political problem. His first proposal is civil religion, namely, the use of fictitious religion for political purposes. His second proposal is the privatization of religion through the promotion of fideism. Commentators’ disputes over Montaigne’s apparent fideism have tended to focus on whether this shows a conventional acceptance of Christian faith or a backhanded rejection of it—but they have overlooked its political effect. I argue that Montaigne’s fideism makes faith radically private and therefore politically irrelevant and harmless. Third and finally, Montaigne proposes the separation of the religious from the mundane. In doing so, he allows public religious institutions and theology to exist—but bars them from having anything to do with the affairs of this world under the pious-sounding principle that mundane affairs and rational inquiry are unworthy of the purity of religion.

²⁰ Ibid., 47–48.

²¹ Levine concedes in an endnote that Montaigne’s radical separation between reason and revelation can be taken as either atheistic or fideistic. Levine takes the atheistic side (ibid., 275n63). Hugo Friedrich and Sophie Peytavin argue that Montaigne’s fideism only concedes a possibility of faith, which might remain ever unfulfilled. See Hugo Friedrich, *Montaigne*, ed. Philippe Desan, trans. Dawn Eng (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 104–9; Sophie Peytavin, “Religion et passions chez Montaigne,” in *Les passions à l’âge classique*, ed. P.-F. Moreau (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2006), 45–56. I agree with them on genuine faith being only a probably ever unfulfilled possibility. I also agree with their judgment that Montaigne turns away from God. However, I emphasize that there is political consequence of the mere possibility of faith, which reason cannot refute, and Montaigne provides for the prevention of its disturbance to political order.

2. CIVIL RELIGION

In “On Glory,” Montaigne makes a case for the use of civil religion. A major part of the essay is devoted to a critique of honor as vain and based on vulgar opinion. At its end, however, Montaigne concedes that “if that false opinion serves the public good by keeping men to their duty; if the people are incited to virtue by it...then let it boldly flourish and may it be fostered among us as much as is in our power.”²² He then gives the example of Socrates and Plato’s introduction of “divine operations and revelations, anywhere and everywhere, when human strength gives out.”²³ Montaigne proceeds to show that such a method is employed by “all the lawgivers”:

Since men are not intelligent enough to be adequately paid in good coin let counterfeit coin be used as well. That method has been employed by all the lawgivers. And there is no polity which has not brought in some vain ceremonial honours, or some untruths, to serve as a bridle to keep the people to their duties; that is why most of them have fables about their origins and have beginnings embroidered with supernatural mysteries. That is what has lent credence to bastard religions and led them to find favour among men of understanding.²⁴

Montaigne goes on to enumerate such prophet-founders as Numa of Rome, Zoroaster of Persia, Trismegistus of Egypt, Minos of Crete, Lycurgus of Sparta, Draco and Solon of Athens, and Moses, among others—not forgetting to add the Machiavellian lip service to Moses’s God as truly divine.

Yet Montaigne does not stop at abstract theoretical consideration of the use of religion for political ends; he also reflects on the Christian religion of his time through this lens. He agrees with Pierre Bunel’s political reason for recommending Sebond’s book to his father:

²² Montaigne, *Essays*, 715.

²³ *Ibid.* This comment on Plato and Socrates’s civil religion is an addition after 1588 in the [C] text. During his last years, from 1588 to 1592, Montaigne seems to have been greatly interested in the use of religion for political ends in Plato. Montaigne’s references to Plato in the first two editions of *Essays* up to 1588 seem mostly, if not in every instance, to come from indirect sources such as Diogenes Laertius. According to Pierre Villey, there are only one “allusion” to the *Laws* and two “reminiscences” of the *Republic* before 1588. Among the additions and changes Montaigne made between 1588 and his death in 1592, there are twenty-two references to specific passages in the *Republic* and twenty-nine to the *Laws* (as well as six to *Gorgias*). The central focus of these references is the question of civil theology and civil religion. I venture to suggest that this might be a theoretical problem that occupied Montaigne during his last years. See, e.g., *Essays*, 131, 356, 360, 365, 571, 575, 715. See also Pierre Villey, *Les sources et l’évolution des Essais de Montaigne*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1933), 1:212–15.

²⁴ Montaigne, *Essays*, 715.

He recommended it to him as a book which was very useful for the period in which he gave it to him: that was when the novelties of Luther were beginning to be esteemed, in many places shaking our old religion. He was well advised, clearly deducing that this new disease would soon degenerate into loathsome atheism. The mass of ordinary people lack the faculty of judging things as they are, letting themselves be carried away by chance appearances. Once you have put into their hands the foolhardiness of despising and criticizing opinions which they used to hold in the highest awe (such as those which concern their salvation), and once you have thrown into the balance of doubt and uncertainty any articles of their religion, they soon cast all the rest of their beliefs into similar uncertainty. They had no more authority for them, no more foundation, than for those you have just undermined; and so, as though it were the yoke of a tyrant, they shake off all those other concepts which had been impressed upon them by the authority of Law and awesomeness of ancient custom.

*Nam cupide conculcatur nimis ante metutum*²⁵

Luther's innovation shakes the old religion. Once the door of doubting and criticizing the old authority is opened, the whole structure will sooner or later be destroyed. And atheism is around the corner. Bunel recommends Sebond's book as a defense of the old religion, on which the entire social structure is said to depend. Montaigne agrees with Bunel's critique of Protestant innovation: "He was well advised." Notably, Bunel's critique (as Montaigne presents it) is a political one. He does not argue for the truth or falsehood of the old religion, Luther's innovation, or atheism. He is concerned with the collapse of the "authority of Law" and "ancient custom." The context of the quotation from Lucretius is his account of the emergence and evolution of society in book 5 of *De rerum natura*. That passage depicts the chaos after ambition infected men in society and kings were slain in the universal struggle "to ascend to the highest honor" (*ad summum succedere honorem*). The next sentence of the passage in Lucretius is "the situation therefore turns to uttermost dregs and whirlwinds" (*res itaque ad summam faecem turbasque redibat*).²⁶ As Montaigne sympathetically presents it, Bunel's critique of Luther's innovation is that it is a threat to the political order. The possible slide of "the mass of ordinary people" from Catholicism to Lutheran innovation and further to

²⁵ Ibid., 490. Screech translates the quoted line from Lucretius "That which once was feared too greatly is now avidly trampled underfoot."

²⁶ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, rev. M. F. Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), book 5, line 1141. My translation.

atheism is not presented as a fall from truth to error, but as a change from one set of opinions to another, accompanied by social chaos.

While Montaigne agrees with Bunel's political defense of Sebond's project, it also distances Montaigne from the essence of the book: it comes from a father who lacks judgment, and the learned Bunel did not recommend it for the truthfulness of its content.²⁷ Moreover, Montaigne makes clear who he is really distancing himself from: "It seemed too rich and too fine a book for an author whose name is so obscure...so I once asked Adrian Turnebus—who knew everything—what he made of it. He replied that he thought it was a quintessence distilled from St Thomas Aquinas, only a wit like Thomas's, full of infinite learning and staggering subtlety, being capable of such concepts."²⁸

Raymond Sebond is a stand-in for St. Thomas Aquinas.²⁹ Aquinas was known for his effort to reconcile classical learning and Christian teaching and to approach the Christian faith as far as possible through "human, natural reason." Therefore Aquinas, who is both the Christian par excellence and the Aristotelian par excellence, in turn represents confidence in the capacity of human reason to access the inherent order of reality embodied in the

²⁷ Philippe Desan also notes Montaigne's political and contextual justification of Sebond's book and his distancing of himself from its substance. Through situating the publication of "Apology" in the first edition of the *Essays* in the context of Montaigne's career and the political and religious condition of France, Desan argues that Montaigne's "Apology" is really an apology for his own translation of the controversial book of Sebond published eleven years earlier. Desan argues that Montaigne justifies his earlier translation as a youthful exercise in style commanded by his father rather than a recommendation of the substance of Sebond's book; then again, facing the threat of Luther and Calvin, this probably unorthodox weapon can now be used against the new beliefs. Desan is sensitive to the political implications of Montaigne's engagement with theological matters. However, I disagree with his overall presentation of Montaigne as almost exclusively concerned with the advancement of his own political career. I will argue that as a philosopher, through calling readers' attention to the political use and abuse of religion and by discussing the relationship between reason and faith, Montaigne assays solutions to the perennial theoretical question of the relationship between and among religion, reason, and political life. See Desan, *Montaigne: A Life*, 285–307.

²⁸ Montaigne, *Essays*, 491.

²⁹ See Schaefer, *Political Philosophy of Montaigne*, 48–49. Levine notes that Sebond's extreme rationalism differs from Aquinas's sophisticated discussions. See Levine, *Sensual Philosophy*, 40–43. Sebond and Aquinas share the rationalist assumption to some degree, and Montaigne's critique targets not just extreme rationalism but the rationalist approach; accordingly, I agree with Schaefer's "stand-in" reading. Admittedly, Aquinas's own treatment of this issue is more sophisticated. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, book 3, chap. 25: "But the human intellect desires and loves and takes more delight in knowledge of divine things, though it can grasp but a little of them." In *Selected Writings*, trans. R. McInerney (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 265. There might be social-political reasons for Montaigne's using Sebond as a stand-in for Aquinas. Prudence to protect himself and concern with social-political order (a concern Montaigne has just mentioned through the words of Bunel) could both motivate Montaigne to give his critique the appearance of a wandering apology for the obscure Sebond.

mainstream of classical philosophy and medieval Christian thought. Notably, such a confidence in the orderliness of nature and human access to it almost always suggests a best rational political arrangement most in accordance with the natural order. So, it is ironic that Montaigne offers a political defense of Thomistic religion as an established institution, which has nothing to do with the inherent quality of the current political arrangement. Montaigne, in other words, offers an anti-Thomistic defense of Thomism.³⁰

In Montaigne's reflection on the political implications of the Christian religion of his time, we may detect a tension between Thomistic Christianity and the use of civil religion—that is, between the former's otherworldly orientation and confidence in human reason and the latter's use of religion for earthly ends and as a concession to the ordinary people's need for untruth. Right after his political defense of Thomistic Christianity in the "Apology," Montaigne goes on to show the instability, corruption, and cruelty of Christian Europe.

In his response to the first charge against Sebond's project of natural theology, namely, that "Christians do themselves wrong by wishing to support their belief with human reasons: belief is grasped only by faith and by private inspiration from God's grace,"³¹ Montaigne sides with the critics and exposes the undesirable political effects of the Thomistic religion supported by "human reasons." Montaigne observes that European Christians vacillate between different factions and act basely.³² The quality of European Christianity is betrayed by the vast distance between Christians' words and their deeds:

³⁰ In *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 97, aa. 2 and 3, Aquinas seems to acknowledge some value in custom and the stability of human law. Yet a closer look shows that his defense of custom is rationalistic: "human law should never be changed unless, in some way or other, the common weal be compensated according to the extent of the harm done in this respect." The standard for change is the rational evaluation of its effect on the common welfare as the end of law. Moreover, the legitimacy of convention can be traced back to the legislator's reason (either the free people legislate through customary acts, or their ruler legislates through tolerating their customary acts): "it is evident that, by human speech, law can be both changed and expounded insofar as it manifests the interior movement and thought of human reason. Wherefore, by actions also, especially if they be repeated so as to make a custom, law can be changed and expounded, and also something can be established which obtains force of law insofar as, by repeated external actions, the inward movement of the will and concepts of reason are most effectually declared." Convention and its change are ultimately justified with reference to reason, which has access to the rational order inherent in God's creation. Aquinas would not agree with Montaigne's conservative reason for defending him. Thomas Aquinas, *On Law, Morality and Politics*, trans. R. J. Regan, ed. R. J. Regan and W. P. Baumgarth (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1988), 78–80.

³¹ Montaigne, *Essays*, 491.

³² *Ibid.*, 492–93.

We ought to be ashamed: among the schools of human philosophy there never was an initiate who did not make his conduct and his life conform, at least in some respect, to their teachings, however difficult or strange: and yet so holy and heavenly an ordinance as ours only marks Christians on their tongues.

Do you want to see that for yourself? Then compare our behaviors with a Moslem or a pagan's: you always remain lower than they are.³³

Montaigne's contemporary Christians are "lower" than an adherent to any pagan philosophy and a Moslem, because these Christians are high-sounding in words but base in deeds. Here Montaigne echoes his critique of Renaissance education in "On Pedantry": the stargazing education of the schoolmasters would naturally produce these vain and base Christians.³⁴

The Thomistic religion sees human reason as the elevated access to ultimate truth and encourages reason's dominion over the passions, including bodily pleasures and pains. Its presumption of reason and unrealistic asceticism lead to a rupture between words and deeds, between rhetoric and motivation. As has been mentioned, it also lends itself to the justification of physical cruelty against the native Americans in the New World as a beneficial dominance exerted over "natural slaves," even though the true motivation behind colonialism is for the most part greed. Moreover, it gives rise to enmity and cruelty among Christian factions who disagree about the ultimate truth, even as it also lends the banner of truth to the violent and ambitious. "Some approach it from this side, some from the other," Montaigne writes, "some make it black, others make it white: all are alike in using religion for their violent and ambitious schemes."³⁵

In this section, we have seen that Montaigne ponders the political strategy of using fictitious religion for political ends. Moreover, through this lens, he reflects on the political usefulness of, and the problems associated with, the Christian religion of his time. He comes to see that there are challenges in using Christianity as a civil religion because of its peculiar characteristics, namely, its otherworldly orientation and (in its Thomistic form) presumption of reason. To put it differently, Christianity aims too high to accommodate the needs of the earthly city.

³³ Ibid., 493.

³⁴ See *ibid.*, 150–62.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 494.

3. FIDEISM AND THE PRIVATIZATION OF RELIGION

Montaigne also experiments with solutions to religion's challenge to politics that would work better in the case of an otherworldly religion such as Christianity. The two solutions I will discuss in this and the next section exploit the character of such religion to carve out an autonomous space for earthly politics by insisting on the otherworldliness of religion.

We mentioned that the first charge against Sebond's project of natural theology is that "Christians do themselves wrong by wishing to support their belief with human reasons: belief is grasped only by faith and by private inspiration from God's grace."³⁶ Montaigne agrees with the principle of this charge.

In a matter so holy, so sublime, so far surpassing Man's intellect as is that Truth by which it has pleased God in his goodness to enlighten in us, we can only grasp that Truth and lodge it within us if God favours us with the privilege of further help, beyond the natural order.... I do not believe, then, that purely human means have the capacity to do this.... Only faith can embrace, with a lively certainty, the high mysteries of our religion.³⁷

In agreeing that there is an insurmountable gap between human reason and faith "beyond the natural order," and that faith can only come from God's grace, Montaigne favors an understanding of religion as a radically *private* matter over an understanding of it as a something that can be taught, disputed, or communicated.

I agree with those perceptive commentators who have pointed out that Montaigne's fideism serves to distance human beings from God and to show his contemporaries' lack of faith.³⁸ And yet, even if Montaigne shows there *has never been* genuine faith through his exposure of the corruption of European Christians, he does not and cannot conclude from such historical and empirical observations the impossibility of such faith. Both Montaigne and these commentators recognize the profound theoretical difficulty in using human reason to deny the possibility of revelation. Moreover, Montaigne recognizes ordinary people's need for religion and their temptation to "experience revelation" either out of self-deceit or ambition. Accordingly, instead of being a backhanded form of antireligious enlightenment, Montaigne's

³⁶ Ibid., 491. Screech reasonably translates *particuliere* as "private."

³⁷ Ibid., 492.

³⁸ We have discussed Schaefer's and Levine's views. In Friedrich's words, faith in Montaigne is "a theoretical acknowledged chance," which could remain forever unfulfilled (*Montaigne*, 105).

fideism, I argue, defuses the disturbing effects of such temptations on politics by means of a “privatization of religion.”

By seemingly stressing the dignity of faith as coming only from God, supernaturally, to a private individual, Montaigne once and for all deprives any prophecy of authority, for two reasons. The first reason is that genuine religious experience cannot be distinguished, in its appearance, from credulity, superstition, and pretension, since there is no external sign of faith. The second and more important reason is that prophecy, which is public in nature, has no role to play in religion, since faith is only infused internally by God and needs no teaching, preaching, or any other persuasion by words or by force. The political effect of fideism is the “privatization” of religion, which protects the political order from religious interference by disarming the prophet.

4. THE SEPARATION OF THE RELIGIOUS FROM THE MUNDANE

Montaigne’s view of faith as an absolutely private matter leaves no meaningful room for public religious institutions, and his separation between faith and reason leaves no room for reason about God (“theology”), either. However, in “On Prayer,” Montaigne seems to suggest a third solution to the uneasy relationship between religion and political society, and one that allows for public religious institutions and theology in a society.

The main argument in “On Prayer” is that prayers should not be contaminated by earthly desires or even by any concern with mundane affairs: “Our soul must be pure, at least for that instant when we make our prayer, free from the weight of vicious passions.”³⁹ Montaigne condemns prayers aiming at all kinds of worldly advantages from a soul “still full of concupiscence,” as if the prayers were “practical magic.”⁴⁰ He insists that one should pray with a religious mood and not use religion as a means for mundane ends.

In addition to separating religious activities such as prayers from mundane desires and affairs, Montaigne also suggests separating the study of theology and that of philosophy, nominally for the sake of the dignity and purity of the former: “Christian Doctrine holds her rank better when set apart.... Philosophy, says St Chrysostom, has long been banished from the School of Divinity as a useless servant judged unworthy of glimpsing, even

³⁹ Montaigne, *Essays*, 356–57.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 364.

from the doorway when simply passing by, the sanctuary of the holy treasures of sacred doctrine.⁴¹ Note that this is effectually denying that philosophy should be the servant of theology. By conceding a (nominally dignified) space for theology, Montaigne secures an autonomous space for philosophy.

It has been argued that with his “rigorism” regarding the requirements for religious activities and contemplation in “On Prayer,” Montaigne presents a protestant-inclined critique of the ordinary practice of the Catholic Church.⁴² And yet, while it might contain a critique of Catholic practice, “On Prayer” has a greater theoretical significance, as it proposes yet another solution to the challenge of religion to political order.

Compared with the privatization of religion, this solution of separating the religious from the mundane makes greater concessions to the ordinary people’s need for religion, as it allows for the expression of their religiosity in theology and religious activities. On the other hand, in contrast to the approach of civil religion, which channels people’s enthusiasm for religious activities and doctrines to serve political ends, it draws a clear line between religion and politics, nominally for the sake of the purity of religion, with the effect that politics enjoys its autonomous sphere. In sum, this solution grants considerable room to ordinary people’s need for religion, while preventing religious activities and thinking from being masks, excuses, or justifications for human greed and ambition and thereby disturbing civil peace and order.

5. CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have contended, first, with those who read Montaigne as simply a traditional Christian. Montaigne indicates that Christianity is at the center of some of the acutest problems of his time, namely, the cruelty of Christian asceticism, the divisive fanaticism among European Christians, and Christian pious cruelty in the New World, and he offers radical reflections on the relationship between and among the Christian religion, politics, and human reason. These reflections call into question the Christian religion of his time and carry implications for a new order.

At the same time, however, I take issue with Schaefer’s antireligious interpretation of Montaigne’s new order, especially his pivotal argument that Montaigne anticipates the Baconian vision of the advancement of human

⁴¹ Ibid., 361.

⁴² See Vincent Carraud, “Avoir l’âme nette: Scepticisme et rigorisme dans ‘Des prières,’” in *Montaigne et la théologie*, ed. Philippe Desan (Geneva: Droz, 2008), 73–89.

knowledge for the betterment of the human condition, a vision that reconciles the ordinary people with philosophy in a liberal society and rids them of their need for religion. In addition to presenting textual difficulties, this interpretation cannot account for either the philosophical plausibility of Montaigne's critique of empiricism and probability or the entailed critique of the idea of the advancement of science. More importantly, Montaigne cannot be unaware that the modern presumption of reason in a Baconian program is at least as dangerous as the ancient presumption of reason that he criticizes.

This essay has contributed to fleshing out a moderate Montaigne as Levine interprets him. I argue that Montaigne, taking into consideration the necessity of civil peace and order, the ordinary people's need for religion, and the fundamental limitation of human reason, proposes three solutions to the theological-political problem: civil religion, the privatization of religion, and the separation of the religious from the mundane.

“Satanic,” “An Atheistic Doctrine of Woman”: A Review of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1951)

IDA FRIEDERIKE GÖRRES

TRANSLATED BY JAN C. BENTZ AND JENNIFER SUE BRYSON

TRANSLATORS’ NOTE

What follows is a translation of Ida Friederike Görres, “Die ‘Erfindung’ der Frau: Zu Simone de Beauvoirs *Le deuxième sexe*,” *Wort und Wahrheit: Monatsschrift für Religion und Kultur* 6, no. 1 (January 1951): 58–63. The original German text does not have citations. It has, inconsistently, only a few in-text page references. To the extent possible, we have tried to find the quotations from de Beauvoir’s work in an established English translation.

Ida Friederike Görres (1901 Bohemia – 1971 Germany, née von Coudenhove) was a Catholic author, most well-known for her works on the saints and the Catholic Church.¹ Görres was critical of the “women’s movement” during her lifetime—rejecting, for example, calls for women’s ordination.²

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¹ For more about Ida Friederike Görres and her work, see, e.g., Hanna-Barbara Gerl-Falkovitz, “Only the Lover Discerns’: A Brief Introduction to Ida Friederike Görres,” trans. Jennifer S. Bryson, *LOGOS: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 23, no. 4 (Fall 2020): 117–22, as well as idagoerres.org.

² Ida Friederike Görres, “Women in Holy Orders?,” trans. Anon., *The Month*, n.s., 34, no. 2 (August 1965): 84–93. A second English translation was published in the United States as Ida Friederike Görres, “Women as Priests? This Woman Says ‘No,’” trans. Anon., *Catholic Transcript*, December 17, 1965. Both translations are available at <https://idagoerres.org/essays>.

In his critical study of feminist theology, Manfred Hauke groups Görres among the “highly cultured women in the twentieth century who, from a Catholic perspective, have made outstanding contributions, and precisely to the question of women: the writers Gertrud von le Fort, Sigrid Unset, and Ida Friederike Gorres; the philosopher Edith Stein; the catechist Oda Schneider, the theologian Barbara Albrecht; and many others. Feminist theology is blind to testimonies like these.”³



Ida Friederike Görres: Review of Simone de Beauvoir's
The Second Sex (1951)

That there is a “woman question” is arguably not disputed by any thinking person: that is to say, on one hand, there is the fact that the position of women within human society, which has been fairly uniform and stable for thousands of years in almost all known cultures, fluctuated for about a century and then changed rapidly and in many ways, and is still in the grips of change; and on the other, it is the case that this fact is judged differently—by some as necessary, as desired, as a long due and positive development, by others as questionable and deplorable, as a decay and degeneration of incalculable consequences. An extensive literature deals with these historical and social phenomena, making demands and accusing, or defending and justifying, depending on the point of view of the authors. Some may just start from practical impulses, prospects, and consequences, while others attempt the deepest metaphysical exploration of the human sexual binary; everyone will probably agree that this reorganization, whether it is rebellion or liberation, is inexorably underway.

We can analyze the beginnings of this movement in Europe in the late nineteenth century fairly precisely, down to its particular social and economic roots and catalytic moments. There is no doubt that the industrialization of food and clothing, in particular, has greatly shrunk the scope of the “house,” as numerous vital tasks that have been left to housewives since the dawn of culture were suddenly relocated elsewhere. The female capabilities thus freed up demanded a different sphere of activity. In this respect, one can claim,

³ Manfred Hauke, *God or Goddess? Feminist Theology: What Is It? Where Does It Lead?*, trans. David Kipp (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 252–53.

even without “historical materialism,” that at least the urgent initial stage of the German women’s movement is a symptom of the crisis arising from the newly emerging, unrelenting, and irrevocable “unemployment” of bourgeois women. That is why this, at first, did not have an impact on “women” per se, but rather on the class affected by this—neither the peasant woman nor the aristocratic woman took notice of this. But the gradual transformation of the “upper middle-class young ladies”—this superfluous and senseless form of existence—into “working women” touched many other chords, including more essential ones. The new possibilities of higher education, the new indirect contact with the wider, male-dominated world, and the zeitgeist have profoundly transformed the female view of her own circumstance and her own, as yet unexplored, possibilities. The changed attitudes of men toward human beings and the world, toward law and duty, toward freedom and self-determination have influenced women directly and indirectly; perhaps it was precisely the “emancipated” women who showed themselves to be the most docile and uncritical students?

What the “working” woman experienced and thought also affected the life of the “domestic” woman to a large extent, and the life of daughters who were already being equipped and formed for a new future. More and more, the “practical” question reveals itself to be a metaphysical one. More and more, the question is shifting from the initial circumstance, from the question of what women can, may, and should *do*, down to the foundation: who and what a woman *is*—which embodiment of being human is actually assigned and entrusted to her.

It is probably widely understood that the term “human” is more comprehensive and deeper than “man” or “woman,” that “being human” belongs to both of them, albeit in different molds, and that what they share together in existence is greater than the particularities of each. From this it follows, among other things, that each of the two suffers irremediable damage if one wants to confine and limit him or her to what is only-male or only-female, clinically completely separated from the other.

It is well known that this can happen and has happened again and again, and many contemporaries consider it normal and natural. It is precisely the woman, to the greatest extent, who was fated to be considered and evaluated not as a female human being, but exclusively as “the female,” the pure sexual being, who is denied all possibilities of development that do not relate to these functions. In this sense, she was and is *less* than a human being; “woman = human minus what is common to humans”—in language, specifically in our

[German] language, classified as a thing: *the* female, not *the* woman.⁴ The fact that a man is often also regarded as “only-a-man,” in the sense that the English say “human” or “male,” is not clearly evident in our [German] language. *The* zoological male [*Männchen*] is limited in linguistic usage to animals. But this effective limitation does not show itself so clearly in the exterior life of the human man.

Now, of course, there would be a lot of space to argue about the extent to which this or that—whether virtue, ability, career path, or item of clothing—is “human” or strictly masculine or feminine in the exclusive sense of the word. This is precisely what seems to us to be the most pressing issue in “the woman question.” Because within patriarchal cultures, the man tends to demand that almost everything “generally human” be a male monopoly or else be allowed to apply only to that which has male characteristics.

It seems to us that the real task of the women’s movement of our time is not to reshape what is masculine, but to retrieve or reshape broad aspects of what is human with a female configuration. However, the discussion always starts from the self-evident assumption that *there are* two human poles, the male and the female, and that an equitable balance of their rights, tasks, abilities, etc., is to be found.

The Second Sex (*Le deuxième sexe*, volume 1, *Les faits et les mythes*, and volume 2, *L’expérience vécue*, Gallimard, Paris 1949) by Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre’s wife, cuts the Gordian knot of such questions with one amazingly simple blow. What is surprising is not the content. It is unfurled with truly professorial thoroughness, with an immensely rich compendium of almost all of the material from the literature of the older European as well as the more recent American women’s movements. What is surprising is rather its thesis: Simone de Beauvoir insists *that there is no such thing as woman*. Woman as we know her is rather a fabrication, a myth, a “beautiful fictional character.” The “female soul” is just as much a purposeful propaganda lie as the “Negro soul” or the “Jewish soul” or some other ethnic soul. Nothing about woman is natural; rather, she is an elaborate result of civilization.⁵ Man *invented* woman—the “true” woman, the “female”; that is, he invented everything that differs from him except the sexual organs in the “authentic woman”: he invented the “female nature,” the “female character,” the female disposition,

⁴ That is, “wie ein Ding gewertet—*das* Weib, nicht *die* Frau.”

⁵ See, for example, Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), xx. In the original review, Görres cites Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, vol. 1, *Les faits et les mythes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 569. However, volume one of the 1949 edition does not have a page 569.

instincts, traits, the female destiny. Neither biology, nor psychology, nor psychoanalysis knew anything of the sort. Neither ovaries nor uteruses, that is, “birthing mothers” [*Gebärmutter*], could produce such a thing.⁶ Everything that is called “particular to the female” is only the reflection of a circumstance, and this is imposed on women by men; “the ‘true woman’ is an artificial product that civilization makes, as formerly eunuchs were made. Her presumed ‘instincts’ for coquetry, docility, are indoctrinated...”⁷ “Femaleness” is a euphemistic expression for adulteration and mutilation.

With a tremendous passion, brilliant mind, sparkling temperament, keen intellectual acrobatics, and a great deal of erudition, this thesis is presented over almost one thousand pages and built on a foundation of existentialism. This thesis is supposed to have been discovered, at long last, after being unknown for however many millennia, as if solving a seemingly unsolvable question with astonishing simplicity, that is to say, as the key to the gender problem that was understood by no one until now.

Because [claims de Beauvoir]: The actual definition of a human being is that of a being who is not “given,” but rather continually makes him- or herself what he or she is. The human being is not a species, but a historical idea. Even the body is not a thing, but rather a circumstance. There is no essence, no given permanent being—only eternal, free, self-determined becoming. The human exists in that he or she continually and creatively overcomes what is given about him- or herself and his or her own worldly reality. This transcendence, however, is solely man’s right of inheritance, while woman is condemned to immanence and mere facticity—in fact, condemned by man to be his opposite. This pure factuality is worthless and meaningless, it is a barrier and a prison. A human can transcend the right of inheritance only by disregarding it, breaking it, making it submit to his sovereignty; “the free spirit with all its riches must project itself toward an empty heaven that it is to populate.”⁸ There is no fate and no destiny. There is no being, no “nature,” and *no good*. “Life” by itself has no reason to exist—and the curse of women is to be chained to the mere repetition and maintenance of what is in itself meaningless. “Being, persisting, and continuing” are merely negative concepts—that is why the man pushes them onto the woman and forces her

⁶ Görres appears to intend the twofold meaning here of the German word *Gebärmutter*—the uterus as well as the literal meaning of this compound word, consisting of “birthing” (*Gebär-*) and “mothers” (*-mutter*), as if women who give birth reproduce only more women who give birth.

⁷ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 408. Görres cites *Le deuxième sexe*, 1:174.

⁸ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 712. Görres cites *Le deuxième sexe*, 2:448.

to represent them in order to become conscious of the contrast of his own, dynamic values, the only real ones. For “the inwardness of the existent is only nothingness”—*n’est que néant*—“and because he must project himself into an object in order to reach himself...”⁹ “Whereas in serving the species, the human male also remodels the face of the earth, he creates new instruments, he invents, he shapes the future.”¹⁰

All of this, that is, human existence in general, is denied to women. In her existence, even the word “truth” has lost its meaning, because she is unable to disclose the world by acting. She has no goals and no tasks, just “activities” to kill time. *Everything* that she is allowed to do, no matter how “public” and far reaching, has the inner weight of “ladylike handicrafts.”

Woman knows no responsibility. Her entire existence consists of waiting on man or child, waiting in multiple forms—in eternal provisionality, in invalidity, in the unimportance of the lower world of immanence and contingency—and her vindication always lies in the hands of others. She is nothing but an element—and an insignificant one at that—of male life, while the man arranges her entire life. As a reward for complete slavery, the man grants her “a parcel of the world”: she does not even have enough of a life of her own that she could oppose the truths and values that the man has created with a female counterworld. She can only deny his own truths and values (hence, woman’s well-known contrariness!) or “swallow” them uncritically, submissively.

All she has left is to adjust stubbornly to the impossible perfection of “being” *instead of doing*, in three particular ways: in narcissism, in love, and in religion. That is, in each instance in the exaggeration, inflation, and deification of one’s own tiny self, either in the idolatry of one’s own vanity or of one’s “own” husband, or in the absolutely delusional world of religious imagination, which promises her a “soul” and eternity.

Until now, woman has been “part victim, part accomplice,”¹¹ for, as is hammered into us with tireless repetition and variation, the worst thing about the tragedy of woman since the mists of ancient times is that she, robbed

⁹ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 186.

¹⁰ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 64.

¹¹ Perhaps Görres is paraphrasing this repeated theme, or perhaps quoting one of the following passages from de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*: “her pose as victim, an accomplice” (548); “half consenting, half revolted” (383); “The fact is that the traditional woman is a bamboozled conscious being and a practitioner of bamboozlement” (709); “and here she is, victim and shrew in spite of herself” (723). The original has no citation for this.

of freedom, personal dignity, and self-worth, is transformed into being a thing, a quarry, an item of property, having made common cause with her vanquisher in shameful consent—*complicité*. She has accepted the assigned role of “vassal” and identified herself with it. She has eagerly endeavored to confirm the phony myths that the man wove and puffed up around her to his advantage. Woman has betrayed woman. The culmination of this dark deal, however, is that the vanquisher offers her, as a reward, the ambiguous compensation of being glorified as the “eternal feminine,” an abysmally lying cult of her slave qualities, a comfortable delusion that mythologizes and absolutizes her submission, making her the “higher essence,” exaggerated into the embodied “ideal,” while every authentic portion of the world and life is still denied to her. Her dungeon is turned by ways of lies into a palace and a temple, her chains into jewelry. In the cult of the Madonna, the tremendous lie reaches its peak: the “Handmaid of the Lord”—the woman who kneels before her own son, adoring the man within her as her god—is crowned with pseudo-glory.¹² And the woman *goes along* in this because she has recognized that the way of submission, carefree-living, irresponsibility, and immaturity is the more comfortable manner of existence. Therefore, almost without exception—even in our enlightened times—she succumbs to the temptation to surrender herself to a “protector” and becomes more and more entangled in her innocent-indebted “curse,” which crystallizes most sharply in the circumstance of marriage.

The core of this form of existence lies in the fact that the man has declared and stamped her as “an other” and accepts and admits her only as “an other.” In fact, as an other “in the manner of one who is not real”: not as a companion, not as a real, equal counterpart in mutuality, but as a fantastical, fictitious “other.” She is everything that is not he, what he does not *want* to be and at the same time “longs for” in an unreal way, as the absolute opposite, the background against which he stands out and becomes conscious of himself. Thus, she is for him the “lovely deception,” the embodied illusion, an object and property, and at the same time a “secret,” eternally shimmering, an incomprehensible “nature,” the faceless and contourless “all” that “everything” is allowed to be, but she is not man, not a person. Since no woman fulfills these requirements “naturally,” she has been artificially made to do so: through continuous inexorable and systematic mutilation and deformation of her spirit

¹² Since Görres is describing de Beauvoir’s view, we have written the words “son,” “man,” and “god” lowercase. The question whether to capitalize these arises only in English, not in German, because in German, all nouns are capitalized. So, in Görres’s text there was no ambiguity. Opting for lowercase here is simply a decision of the translators.

and even of her body from childhood on, through deliberately cultivated “weakness” and “frailty,” which is dependent on the protector and sustainer, by the “reification” of her body into mere “flesh” or a luxury article, by emptying her entire existence except for the relationship to a man as the sole meaning and content, by an artificially cruel increase in all reproductive problems, and by mercilessly eliminating every other possibility. What remains after such a process through many generations is: the “authentic woman.”

“What a misfortune to be a woman! And yet the misfortune, when one is a woman, is at bottom not to comprehend that it is one” (Kierkegaard; the motto of volume 2 of *The Second Sex*).¹³

In summary: until now, the human being has been embodied only and exclusively in man. Only the man, only the default way of existence of the man *in its facticity* is human and suitable for being human.

That is the real surprise of this peculiar book. It is the most passionate, one-sided, narrow-minded apology and idealization (*apothēsis*) of man, as he is, that I have ever come across. And this despite innumerable hateful charges against men.

The author at one point asserts that there is no “myth of the male” alongside the many changing myths of the female, because every “myth always implies a subject who projects his hopes and his fears toward a sky of transcendence. Women do not set themselves up as Subject and hence have erected no virile myth...”¹⁴

It seems to me that this book presents precisely this myth. This woman, in any case, is so completely devoted to the “superiority,” the glory of the man, the “male,” that she rejects and denies everything, really everything, that is not expressly and emphatically “masculine” in the narrowest sense of the word. She is completely blind to all values outside of his sphere. Not only is there no “other,” there should be no other that could exist. The fact that she has become “other” is the curse and fault of the woman; and her liberation, her salvation, and her humanization lie only on the path of the most perfect possible convergence with him. Here Simone de Beauvoir stands strangely enough side by side with the fanatical misogynists.

¹³ Quoted in de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 720.

¹⁴ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 142. In the original article the opening quotation mark is erroneously placed before “Women.”

It is also strange how this otherwise extremely sharp-sighted, analytically gifted author not only constantly confuses human beings with men, but also just as persistently confuses “man” as an archetype and a species with each individual man.

She always implies (with the exception of a few hesitant comments on the side) that men exist only in an “ideal form,” in splendid versions—as thinkers, as creators, as heroes, and as conquerors: this ideal-man is always juxtaposed with the wretchedness of the unsuccessful and stunted female entity. Man is always occupied exclusively with modifying the face of the earth,¹⁵ “bearing the tremendous responsibility for the whole of humanity,”¹⁶ wafting heavenward on eagles’ wings, challenging his century, and however else a girl with a crush may fancy her lover. Every single boy, of course, has “the whole world open”; each one plans and models his life as he sees fit, he victoriously overcomes all obstacles, compels the future, he is independent, is naturally qualified to such appropriation of the world, lives among decisions and deeds, in a “coherent universe that is a thought reality”—while she “struggles” only in immanence, in a “magic reality” that cannot be examined through thinking, abandoned to magic, superstition, and to religion absolutely on a par with these.¹⁷ Simone de Beauvoir reproaches one of her critics right from the start that each of these gentlemen feels like a demigod vis-à-vis woman—but doesn’t she confirm him, in a way that could not be more effusive? When one reads this book carefully, man appears as the “higher being” and woman seems *effectively* much closer to the beasts than to him.

It is impossible to count the passages in which the author, with innumerable variations, confuses the human being per se not with man, but with a “zoological male.” As an example, for all the others, the following may apply: it is not surprising, in view of all this, that Simone de Beauvoir calls for free homosexuality for all women, yet one might expect the justification to be that women can, may, and should achieve independence in the erotic and sexual realms and make themselves independent of men—but far from it! Rather, the “reason” is that the female body itself is quite simply the object of *human*

¹⁵ De Beauvoir writes, “in serving the species, the human male also remodels the face of the earth, he creates new instruments, he invents, he shapes the future” (*The Second Sex*, 64).

¹⁶ Perhaps Görres is referring to one of these passages: “Woman preserves her transcendence by transferring it to him; but he must bring it to bear upon the whole world” (*The Second Sex*, 658); “For the individuals who seem to us most outstanding, who are honored with the name of genius, are those who have proposed to enact the fate of all humanity in their personal existences, and no woman has believed herself authorized to do this” (*ibid.*, 713).

¹⁷ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 726.

eroticism: so the woman proves herself human when she chooses a female mate. Therefore, moreover, every woman is “by nature” a lesbian—now suddenly there is a “nature”!—and behaves by nature in a hostile and disgusted manner toward the male body. A large amount of “documentation” from psychoanalytic consultation hours, from psychiatric clinics, etc., would be needed to provide the “proof” for this assertion. In the same way, the woman becomes human vis-à-vis the man (who apparently “unnaturally” cannot be completely eliminated in this territory) only when she is able to love “just like a man”—that is, in a manner that is episodic, uninvolved, detached. In other words: when she does not love like a man understood as a human being—with loyalty, responsibility, reverence—but like a “zoological male.”

The Second Sex gives the impression that it was written, not by a woman, and certainly not by a man, but by a *transvestite man* who was brought up as a girl and as a woman from an early age—as a pampered “little princess,” as a dissatisfied, idle “upper middle-class young lady”—and therefore lives in obstinate, poisonous hatred and implacable vengefulness for all things and everything “feminine,” in raging envy of the masculinity that has been denied and having lost an objective view of both [the feminine and the masculine].

So, for example, there is the remarkable passage that laments with great pathos that one of the most serious and most consequential ways the woman is stunted is that she is denied the “experience of the fist”¹⁸—the violence—which boys are allowed to enjoy in fighting and hitting—an irreplaceable building block in the development of a real personality. What all-consuming and inconsolable envy speaks from these and similar sentences!

Unfortunately, however tempting it may be, there is little point in attempting to refute one by one this vast accumulation of errors, caricatures, and wild assertions. Not only would it require an entire monograph, but such a process, while interesting, would be rather unproductive. It seems more important to us to track down the hidden impetus under this huge mountain of images and theories.

First, here we find the most complete and most consistent exposition of an *atheistic doctrine of woman*: “religion” is treated on relatively few pages and in scattered marginal notes, with careless scorn and a clear gesture of indifference, which in itself is supposed to indicate the unspeakable irrelevance, quirkiness, and slightly comical silliness of the subject; only very rarely does

¹⁸ Görres is referring to the phrase “blow of the fist” in de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 423. “Experience of the fist” is our translation of Görres’s “Erlebnis der Faust.”

a flicker of the most poisonous hatred strike. But the whole book comes from the unwavering atheism of J.-P. Sartre.

We want to highlight just one aspect:

This fully developed, lavishly illustrated atheistic theory of woman betrays astonishingly clearly a basic trait of the satanic: boundless *hatred of Creation*.¹⁹ It is actually quite clear: whoever hates the Creator, the “*Auctor*,” must necessarily hate and deny, devalue and insult, what “is given,” what is from him, *therefore* nature. The deeper we grasp the connection between Creator and creation, the more clearly this basic law of consistently anti-divine thinking reveals itself. Idolatry of the world is relatively harmless next to this; at least it still recognizes the merits of the Divine work, it admires the mirror image, even it prefers the mirror image to the archetype with conscious defiance. True anti-theism goes further: it hates everything that might be recognizable as a “trace,” a shadow, a sign, a message of the One Who is hated from the outset.

From the ground up, our world is built and founded on two poles; every culture, every philosophy, every religion knows this. The tension of the binary goes much further than the merely human binary of man and woman, all the more so in what is strictly sexual; it not only pervades the organic world, it is reflected in the more comprehensive concepts and images of the pairs of reality, such as heaven and earth, day and night. Denying this binary aspect of Creation is the actual objective of this book—to deny and defame the concept of “other.” Hence the truly satanic hatred of marriage *in and of itself*, not just of the various defective or degenerate forms of marriage. Hence the hatred of the “home,” which is a small reflection of the world, a small self-contained cell of peaceful and fruitful unity in a binary. At the same time, what poets or religions have had to say and what is reflected in custom and tradition of the human experience in the home and the family is not unknown to the author; but it is shrugged off wholesale, as [the product of] a bourgeois-capitalist

¹⁹ Görres expressed a similar sentiment in 1950 in chapter 1 of her book *The Church in the Flesh (Die leibhaftige Kirche)*: “The Adversary is at work also, indeed precisely, in the realm of the visible. His grand intent is the alienation of the whole Creation from God, the misuse of it for the fight against the Most High. *No one hates ‘nature’ more than Satan*, because it is the work and reflection of God; and one of Satan’s most cunning weapons is to repeatedly beguile man to believe that he must defend nature against God and save it, as it were. His, the Devil’s, most essential work is ‘throwing things into disorder,’ as his name suggests, confusing and corrupting, perverting in every sense, seducing through appearances and deceit, through what is fake and alienated from itself. We are called to be extremely vigilant. We have something precious and irreplaceable to protect.” Ida Friederike Görres, *The Church in the Flesh*, trans. Jennifer Sue Bryson (Providence, RI: Cluny Media, forthcoming).

ideology designed to obfuscate the most massive class interests, as mendacious male tirades designed to obscure female servitude, and the like.

It would be fruitful and interesting to examine the work in detail to see how its witty and poisonous hatred turns with unflinching accuracy against everything, affixes itself to everything in human existence that exhibits a “transparent character,” a capacity to serve as a symbol for invisible reality.

In this sense, this strange and repulsive book, as it were an inverted mirror, is a testament to the elevated metaphysical importance of nature in general and of woman in particular. The human woman reveals herself as *the* symbol of the creature (like the way earth, water, and flower have always been understood as “feminine”), as the one who is a “subject” vis-à-vis God, related to Him, obedient, a receptive creaturehood: because that is what she is, she must disappear, she must be eradicated, her existence must be stamped as the embodiment of a lie. A “neutral” working animal with female genital organs would be harmless in this sense—useful, but metaphysically completely “mute.”

At the same time, however, it must be said that this book contains a tremendous amount of important and interesting material—a large quantity of correct, sharp, lightning-bright observations from everyday life, a series of bold debunkings of the countless bourgeois lies and conventions about the lives of both sexes, genuinely and powerfully breaking through the sentimental masks and disguises of accumulated prejudice. The mosaic consists of countless “correct” and “verifiable” individual maneuvers, while the sham—because it is one—lies in the composition, structure, overlay, and lighting of this gigantic and imposing propaganda film.

It shows the need for similar material to be studied with equal boldness, critical perspective, and openness, but with an intellectual approach that is reasonable regarding and obedient to God, nature, and Truth, and for the results to be presented and discussed among Christians.

Jerome C. Foss, *Flannery O'Connor and the Perils of Governing by Tenderness*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019, xii + 186 pp., \$100.

Flannery O'Connor's Politics

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Jerome Foss's *Flannery O'Connor and the Perils of Governing by Tenderness* has enjoyed four years of life since its publication in 2019. In that time its importance has increased. No other well-trained philosopher has brought such considerable learning to bear on Flannery O'Connor, this nation's most important Christian writer. The time has come to give his book careful attention.

Foss's title and central thesis derive from one of O'Connor's most prophetic political insights:

If other ages felt less, they saw more, even though they saw with the blind, prophetic, unsentimental eye of acceptance, which is to say, of faith. In the absence of this faith *we govern by tenderness* [Foss's emphasis]. It is a tenderness which, long since cut off from the person of Christ, is wrapped in theory. When tenderness is detached from the source of tenderness, its logical outcome is terror. It ends in forced labor camps and in the fumes of the gas chamber. (30)

By "tenderness," O'Connor means the soft-core "compassion" that cares for both groups and individuals in order to provide them moral and material security, never to judge them or demand their transformation. It is not a mere personal heresy, alas, but an abstract and all-encompassing field theory. Rather than cushioning and qualifying these scandalous claims, Foss makes them even more radical by showing their radical political consequences.



In the crucial latter half of his book, Foss adroitly takes his point of departure from a rarely cited O'Connor speech to develop a useful typology for understanding the politics at work in her fiction. There O'Connor describes three basic types of modern men: the Lockean, the Rousseauian, and the Nietzschean. The first type recognizes spirit in himself but fails to recognize a being outside himself whom he can adore as Creator and Lord; consequently he has become his own ultimate concern. He says with Swinburne, "Glory to man in the highest, for he is the highest of things," or with Steinbeck, "In the end was the word and the word was with man." For him, man has his own natural spirit of courage and dignity and pride and must consider it a point of honor to be satisfied with this (80).

THE LOCKEAN MAN OF MONIED PROPERTY

Foss locates the politics of this first kind of modern man in John Locke, especially his *Second Treatise on Government*.¹ The man who gathers acorns from beneath oaks or apples dropped from trees in the woods, Locke argues, adds "something to them more than nature, the common mother of all, had done; and so they became his private right.... [They] become [his] property, without the assignation or consent of anybody" (quoted at 93). According to Locke, governments exist, among other reasons, to promote and protect this natural human desire to acquire property. Private ownership of property produces many good things, of course, trade perhaps most notably. Yet it also produces a drastic emphasis on money. "Once money is introduced," Foss observes, "limitless acquisition is possible, because there is always an incentive to do a little more, to find new things to cultivate, or simply to invent something that can be sold to others for their greater convenience, and eventually luxury" (90).

Foss uncovers heretofore unnoticed emphases on property in O'Connor's stories, especially "A Circle in the Fire" and "Greenleaf." In the latter, Mrs. May has a veritable obsession with her property. She treats Mr. Greenleaf, her farmhand, as if she owned him. Everything on her farm is the property extension of herself, "including the pond, birds, and stream" (93). She worries that a farm worker might be injured, not because of the hurt done to him, but because it will cost her. She even likens the Greenleafs' scrub

¹ "The Declaration of Independence," Foss confesses, "reads like a Lockean primer" (90). This means, of course, that Foss has no desire to condemn or dismiss Locke.

bull to the Greenleaf family, regarding them as “scrub humans,” as if they were so worthless that she would not mind if they were scrubbed out of existence.² Mrs. May even dreams of being securely ensconced in the things she possesses, “safe in the knowledge that [the setting sun] had to sink the way it always did outside of her *property*” (my emphasis). When in the final scene Mr. Greenleaf’s charging bull buries his horns in her lap “like a wild tormented lover,” Mrs. May is given what she most needs, “the chance to quickly reevaluate her priorities” (95). She can no longer flee. In a surprising and transforming moment of grace, the lady embraces the bull as her divine lover. He turns her literally upside down, so that the property beneath her is now negligible “in a world that was but sky.” The sky alone cannot be owned, possessed, propertyed.

THE ROUSSEAUIAN MAN OF GUILT-RIDDEN GOODNESS

Another type of modern man recognizes a divine being not himself, but he does not believe that this being can be known analogically or defined dogmatically or received sacramentally. Spirit and matter are separated for him. Man wanders about, caught in a maze of guilt he cannot identify, trying to reach a God he cannot approach, a God powerless to approach him (100).

Foss traces the political roots of this somewhat lower human type to the romanticism of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau rightly rejects the materialist project of Locke’s followers with their emphasis on private ownership and “governing institutions that protect property.” Such regimes, Rousseau argues, “have sacrificed the authentic freedom that humans once enjoyed when they were simpler creatures for a complex set of expectations and desires that cannot be satisfied when people are in constant competition with one another, regardless of socio-economic class” (101). Rousseau desires to break humanity free from such self-imprisonment. “Man is born free, and everywhere lies in chains,” he ominously announces in the opening sentence of *The Social Contract*. Thus does he call for a regime that would “govern not according to the interest of particular individuals but by the general spirit—or general will

² Thus could a hypertrophied Lockeanism conceivably lead to the fumes of the gas chambers. In “Revelation,” O’Connor portrays Ruby Turpin as another proto-Nazi woman who measures and ranks people according to their property. Yet her hierarchy of the propertyed is upset by the disturbing fact that there is “a colored dentist who [owns] two red Lincolns and a swimming pool and a farm with registered white-face cattle on it.” This troubling truth fills Mrs. Turpin’s nighttime reveries with images she has seen in newsreels from Hitler’s Germany: “Usually by the time she had fallen asleep all the classes of people were moiling and roiling around in her head, and she would dream they were all crammed in together in a box car, being ridden off to be put in a gas oven.” *Flannery O’Connor: Collected Works*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Library of America, 1988).

as Rousseau calls it—of the community.” “Right and wrong, in this view, are not woven into nature,” Foss notes, “but are those precepts that everyone in a community can freely will.” Yet “until a people can be convinced to allow themselves to be governed by a general will,” Foss adds, Rousseauian “romantics are left...angry at their fellow citizens and guilty for their own inability to bring about a society in which no one wears chains” (102).

Foss identifies these angry, guilt-ridden Rousseauian romantics in several of O'Connor's protagonists: Julian in “Everything That Rises Must Converge,” Asbury Fox in “The Enduring Chill,” but supremely in Sheppard in “The Lame Shall Enter First.” O'Connor's novella contains so many previously unnoticed complexities that it calls for the full analysis that follows.

It offers a merciless fictional portrait of Sheppard as an archly righteous doer of good. “I simply want to make the world a better place,” he declares. “If I can help a person,” he adds, “all I want is to do it.”³ This would-be shepherd of needy people works as a helper even in his occupation as city recreation director. Apart from his daily post, Sheppard is an exemplary volunteer—coaching Little League baseball for boys less fortunate than his privileged son, ten-year-old Norton, even surrendering his Saturdays to counsel troubled youths at a reformatory. Yet he receives nothing in return “but the satisfaction of knowing he was helping boys no one else cared about” (597). There Sheppard encounters Rufus⁴ Johnson, a fourteen-year-old delinquent who is less a calculating criminal than a slapdash destroyer: “windows smashed, city trash boxes set afire, tires slashed” (599). He eats out of garbage cans because he likes the food.

Sheppard is drawn to Rufus because he is smart, unlike his merely average or perhaps below-average son. “Johnson was worth any amount of effort because he had...*potential*” (599, emphasis added). If ever there was a case of injustice demanding romantic Rousseauian correction, Rufus is surely it: “Johnson was the most intelligent boy he had worked with and the most deprived” (597). In predictably reductionist terms, Sheppard accounts for Rufus's destructive mentality as compensation for his club foot and the lack of a stable family. Hence his determination to rescue Rufus from his sorry state. Once Johnson is no longer confined to the reformatory, Sheppard seeks

³ O'Connor, *Collected Works*, 609. All further quotations from “The Lame” are taken from this collection and will be cited in-text by page.

⁴ As always in O'Connor, names matter. The privileged Norton has a dignified familial name befitting his privileged status. Rufus by contrast is a countrified name, perhaps indicating that his soul is made of iron, rufous-like, even if we are not told but may well suspect that he is also a redhead.

virtually to adopt him as his surrogate son, giving him keys to his home and providing him with proper educational advantages, including an encyclopedia and a telescope. He hopes the boy might even become an astronaut, “the highest calling of the space age.” As a latter-day Cartesian, Sheppard views the cosmos as cold, empty matter, so that the distant spaces are meant not to be humbly comprehended but proudly mastered. “He wanted [Rufus] to *see* the universe, to see that the darkest parts of it could be penetrated” (601).

Yet Sheppard hopes to convert Rufus not to a physicalist scientism so much as to a secular religion. In triple repetitions offered in brief compass, Sheppard pledges to be Johnson’s savior: “I’m going to save you. The good will triumph” (624). Rufus will have nothing to do with such pseudo-salvation. Instead, he makes his own cornpone distinction between being and doing good: “Listen here, he hissed, I don’t care if he’s good or not. He ain’t *right!*” (604). So long as he is not right with God, Sheppard is wrong in the worst of ways. To Sheppard’s sad uncomprehending son Norton, Johnson thus pronounces the deadliest of all judgments on the good-doing counselor: “‘God, kid,’ Johnson said in a cracked voice, ‘how do you stand it?’ His face was stiff with outrage. ‘He thinks he’s Jesus Christ’” (609).

With the novella’s gradual unfolding, Rufus provides much-needed comic relief from Sheppard’s grim seriousness. He refuses, for example, to embrace the counselor’s attempt to provide him with an orthopedic shoe in order to overcome the grotesque limp caused by the boy’s club foot. Far from being ashamed of his deformity, Johnson regards it as his identifying mark, the source of his scandalous integrity: “Johnson was as touchy about the foot as if it were a sacred object” (610). Against Sheppard’s prying questions, he keeps “the club foot raised always to his knee like a weapon ready for use” (601). Contrary to Sheppard’s conviction that the boy’s petty acts of crime can be explained as a “compensation,” Rufus insists that he is a crook because Satan has him in his power. Hence his insistence that when he dies he is headed for hell. To Sheppard’s cool empiricist claim that there is no reliable evidence of any such place, the unschooled reader of Scripture hotly replies that “The Bible has give the evidence...and if you die you go there and you burn forever.” “Whoever says it ain’t a hell...is contradicting Jesus. The dead are judged and the wicked are damned. They weep and gnash their teeth while they burn...and it’s everlasting darkness” (611).

One of the novella’s darkest ironies is that, far from guiding Johnson toward a secular salvation, Sheppard drives him to become a virtual devil. Having been an insouciant hellion, he becomes a malignant heller. The

crimes Rufus once committed haphazardly he now commits deliberately. And rather than destroying property whose owners he never knew, Rufus makes an all-out attack on Sheppard's very person, desecrating the man and all that attaches to him. Aware, for example, that Norton is incurably grief-stricken over the death of his mother, Johnson deliberately violates the boy's reverence for her. He uses her comb to sweep his hair down and "to the side, Hitler fashion" (605). He crawls into her bed, rummages through her clothes, and even puts on her corset, rudely calling it "her saddle" (606). Wearing the dead woman's underwear, Rufus dances and sings in vulgar imitation of Elvis Presley. Most perniciously of all, he suborns young Norton into his service by telling him that his mother—because she wasn't a whore but a Christian!—dwells happily with God in heaven, yet also that the only way he can join her is to die. As if to court the boy's early death, Johnson adds that "if you live long enough you'll go to hell" (612). Taking hope from such alleged truths, Norton clings ever more desperately to Rufus.

Yet Rufus is not irredeemably satanic. The same hard-gospel road signs nailed to southern pine trees that Sheppard believes had warped young Rufus served, instead, to form him even if inadequately: "DOES SATAN HAVE YOU IN HIS POWER? REPENT OR BURN IN HELL. JESUS SAVES" (600–601). Johnson confesses, for example, that he is damned unless he repents and believes the Gospel. "If I do repent, I'll be a preacher. . . . If you're going to do it, it's no sense in doing it half way" (627). For Rufus Johnson as for Flannery O'Connor, there are no half measures, no safe middle ground between radical belief and radical unbelief: it's either/or.

So eternally valid is its Message, moreover, that the Bible would be true even if Rufus did not believe it. Hence his fine macabre reenactment of Ezekiel 3:1–3, where the prophet eats the scroll filled with words of divine wrath against perfidious Judah, finding it "sweet as honey." Having never tasted the sacramental Bread of Life, Johnson ingests Scripture as its substitute:

"I believe it!" Johnson said breathlessly. "I'll show you I believe it!" He opened the [Bible] in his lap and tore out a page of it and thrust it into his mouth. He fixed his eyes on Sheppard. His jaws worked furiously and the paper crackled as he chewed it.

"Stop this," Sheppard said in a dry, burnt out voice. "Stop it." . . .

Johnson swallowed what was in his mouth. His eyes widened as if a vision of splendor were opening up before him. "I've eaten eat it!" he breathed. "I've eaten it like Ezekiel and it was honey to my mouth! . . . I've eaten it like Ezekiel and I don't want any of your food after it nor no more ever." (627–28)

By the end of the novella, Johnson has begun blessedly to quit his Demonry, even if he has not yet sought his Savior. Though he had escaped detection of the crimes he recently committed, Rufus confesses that he deliberately did them. He wanted to be caught and for the police to bring him before Sheppard, like Jesus being brought before Pilate, the better to expose the falsity of Sheppard's professed trust in him. Rufus seeks to demonstrate that this great doer-of-good cares only for himself, and thus to "show up that big tin Jesus!" "He thinks he's God. I had rather be in a reformatory than in his house, I'd rather be in the pen! The devil has him in his power." "I lie and steal because I'm good at it! My foot don't have a thing to do with it! The lame shall enter first! The halt'll be gathered together.⁵ When I get ready to be saved, Jesus'll save me, not that lying stinking atheist" (630–31). Finally, the police cart Johnson off to jail where, so far as we are told, he still resides. Yet because penitentiaries were originally formed to produce penitence, Rufus may end by becoming the preacher he was called to be, feeding on the Bible's saving Word rather than its paper pages, shouting through the bars of his cell that Jesus alone can save criminals like himself and perhaps even frauds like Sheppard.



Jerome Foss penetrates to the core of Sheppard's implicitly Rousseauian politics, his frustrated, guilt-ridden romantic passion to do generous good that ends in doing terrible harm. "He equates goodness with justice," Foss declares. "When Sheppard thinks of himself as good, he is really focused on his capacity for justice, but he lacks the ability to love. He does not love his son [Norton], nor does he love Johnson.... [He] becomes his own standard of the good.... Sheppard is more interested in *doing* good than in *being* good" (117). Rufus Johnson did not need a reformer to help him *do*, but a friend to help him *be* good.

Even so, Foss fails to discern the full significance of the final scene. Sheppard is a thoroughgoing mortalist. "Your mother isn't anywhere. She isn't unhappy," he tells sad Norton. "She just isn't." Her "spirit lives on in other people," he adds, "and it'll live on in you if you're good and generous like she was" (*Collected Works*, 611). Norton recoils from such godless humanism, especially after his father charges him with selfishness in refusing to stop his sniveling grief. By contrast, the demonic Rufus had unintentionally announced the Gospel truth in telling the boy that his Christian mother

⁵ Rufus is so soaked in Scripture that, even when he misquotes it, he keeps both its King James cadences and its scandalous truthfulness: "So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen" (Matt. 20:16).

dwells with God in heaven, where he can join her when he dies. In the story's wrenching penultimate scene, therefore, Sheppard finds his son hanging from the rafters of his attic room. This must not be mistaken as a sad suicide. In poignant desire to be reunited with his mother, and in literal obedience to Rufus Johnson's preachment, Norton launches himself into space—not as a brave astronaut but as a naive believer in eternal life.

Foss rightly observes that O'Connor "cares for her characters and does not leave them without hope of salvation" (119). She thus grants Sheppard a belated repentance that may seem to signal a final repudiation of his guilty Rousseauian doing of good:

He had stuffed his own emptiness with good works like a glutton. He had ignored his own child to feed his vision of himself. He saw the clear-eyed devil, the sounder of hearts leering at him from the eyes of Johnson. His image of himself shriveled until everything was black before him. He sat there paralyzed, aghast....

A rush of agonizing love for the child rushed over him like a transfusion of life. The little boy's face appeared to him transformed, the image of his salvation; all light. He groaned with joy. He would make everything up to him. He would never let him suffer again. He would be mother and father. He jumped up and ran to his room, to tell him that he loved him, that he would never fail him again. (*Collected Works*, 632)

Yet there may be a Rousseauian romanticism still at work in this blubbering confession. Sheppard may have become as sentimentally tender as he was once sentimentally hard.⁶

THE NIETZSCHEAN MAN OF NIHILIST DESTRUCTION

O'Connor's third type of modern man "can neither believe nor contain himself in unbelief and...searches desperately, feeling about in all experience for the lost God." Foss locates this lowest human type in the low aims and shallow life of Nietzsche's Last Man (124). So did O'Connor. It is important to note

⁶ Since this is one of O'Connor's best-written and most finely honed stories, why did she come to dislike it so much that she considered preventing its 1952 publication in the *Sewanee Review*? "The story doesn't work because I don't know, don't sympathize [with], don't like Mr. Sheppard in the way I know and like most of my other characters.... I just don't know such a man, don't have any felt knowledge of him" (*Collected Works*, 1174–75). Such failure of charity had produced a failure of art, no matter its brilliant success in exposing the politics of Rousseauian romanticism. In an act of prolonged literary repentance, O'Connor spent the next seven years arduously composing *The Violent Bear It Away*, a novel that depicts the reformer Rayber not as a caricatured romantic but as a convincing if misdirected lover of his often-unlovable nephew, Francis Marion Tarwater.

that she did not dismiss Nietzsche. She likened the late modern shrinkage of the human to a technique devised for breeding the wings off chickens, so as to create a greater abundance of tender white meat. She compared this “break-through” to the breeding of the moral sense out of “certain sections of the population,” as Foss notes: “This is a generation of wingless chickens, which I suppose is what Nietzsche meant when he said that God was dead” (125).

Foss is concerned not primarily with Nietzsche’s Last Man but with his Overman. *Übermenschliche* will to power “combines the desire, ambition, and ability to replace worn-out values with something new both in one’s own life and, by implication, in the lives of others” (126). Joy-Hulga Hopewell, the protagonist in “Good Country People,” is O’Connor’s fullest fictional embodiment of an implicitly Nietzschean political philosophy. The lines of Joy Hopewell’s life have fallen in unpleasant places. She limps about on a wooden leg and she has a serious heart ailment as well. With a doctorate in philosophy from a German university, she justifiably chafes at the smug and cramped world she is forced to inhabit. She rebels, therefore, in every way that will offend her ladylike mother—by wearing childish clothes, by slouching in her chair, and finally by an act of willful self-construction, as she gives herself a legal and ominous new name: Hulga. In a deed of pure Nietzschean value-making, she regards it as “her highest creative act.”

Infuriated that, by contrast, Mrs. Hopewell remains blind to her personal limits, Hulga bursts out in undaughterly anger: “Woman! do you ever look inside? Do you ever look inside and see what you are *not*? God! ... Malebranche was right: we are not our own light. We are not our own light!” Lest readers reel from the shock of such an attack, O’Connor moves wittily inside the insulted mother’s mind: “Mrs. Hopewell had no idea to this day what brought that on. She had only made the remark, hoping Joy would take it in, that a smile never hurt anyone.”⁷ Foss explains why Hulga is drawn to Malebranche. Though he “saw himself [as] following Augustine in teaching that all knowledge comes through God,” Malebranche was a Cartesian who set mind against body, thus falling prey “to the dualism that characterizes his [anti-Thomist] theory that our ideas do not derive from our senses.” Thus does Hulga’s atheism rest, as Foss says, “upon a Cartesian foundation in which she seeks knowledge by looking inward to the mind” rather than outward to the sensible world (135).

⁷ O’Connor, *Collected Works*, 268.

Foss is especially keen in exposing what is false in Hulga's derivation of her nihilism from Heidegger when her real patron is Nietzsche. Mrs. Hopewell discovers her daughter's reverence for Heidegger when she happens upon a passage Hulga had underlined in blue pencil from "What Is Metaphysics?":

Science, on the other hand, has to assert its soberness and seriousness afresh and declare that it is concerned solely with what-is. Nothing—how can it be for science anything but a horror and a phantasm? If science is right, then one thing stands firm: science wishes to know nothing of Nothing. Such is after all the strictly scientific approach to Nothing. We know it by wishing to know nothing of Nothing. (135)⁸

Foss rightly notes that Hulga wrongly regards Heidegger as a nihilist: "he argues for the irrational nothingness that lies outside of science's reach. If science is going to concern itself only with the rational, then metaphysics ought to counter its moves and even rebel" (135). As Foss discerns, Heidegger was not a nihilist but a humanist, even if a deeply flawed one. He was opposed, for example, to the conception of the individual that we have seen in Malebranche—namely, as a mere thinking subject (or "thinking substance") who is radically distinct from the world and who is therefore cognitively isolated from it. For Heidegger, the very Being of the individual involves engagement with the world. The fundamental character of *Dasein* is a condition of already "Being-in-the-world"—of already being caught up in, involved with, or committed to other individuals and things. "Authenticity" is another central Heideggerian term. He feared that most human beings inhabit an inauthentic existence. Rather than face up to their own finitude—represented above all by the inevitability of death—they flee from themselves via curiosity, ambiguity, and idle talk. Such conformity characterizes the anonymous *das Man*—"the They."⁹

Hulga knows nothing of Heidegger's humanism, of course. And so she determines to convert a naive Bible salesman named Manley Pointer in order to make him her faux-Heideggerian companion in the Void. This thirty-year-old previously unloved virgin will seduce the stupid Bible thumper by showing him that sexual congress is nothing but a meaningless physical act. In one of the funniest, most macabre, yet wrenching scenes in all of O'Connor's fiction, Pointer proves himself to be not an innocent naif but a

⁸ Having no philosophical training for interpreting Heidegger, Mrs. Hopewell reads these claims as if they were "some evil incantation in gibberish. She shut the book quickly and went out of the room as if she were having a chill" (*Collected Works*, 269).

⁹ Much of this I have brazenly borrowed from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry on Heidegger: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Martin-Heidegger-German-philosopher>. I have silently passed over his reprehensible Nazi and anti-Semitic sympathies.

countrified Nietzschean. He does not violate Hulga's virginity in the hayloft where they have absconded. Instead, he profanes the secular temple of her embittered nihilist life. "She was as sensitive about the artificial leg as a peacock about his tail. No one ever touched it but her. She took care of it as someone else would his soul, in private, and almost with her own eyes turned away."¹⁰ Thus does Pointer seduce Hulga into showing him where her wooden leg joins her torso—and then he makes off with it!

As Pointer descends the hayloft where the annihilated nihilist remains helplessly stranded, he pronounces a final if also hilariously Nietzschean judgment on her: "I may sell Bibles but I know which end is up and I wasn't born yesterday and I know where I'm going! . . . And I'll tell you another thing, Hulga, you ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing ever since I was born!" (283). In this final paratactic sentence of unsubordinated clauses, the unsubordinated Pointer names Hulga's patron political philosopher: Nietzsche.¹¹ He embodies what Hulga had merely theorized: her Nietzschean politics of destruction.

Yet, as we have noted, Flannery O'Connor rarely if ever condemns her characters to a final graceless state. So it may also be with Hulga. Having stolen her glasses no less than her leg, Pointer leaves the philosophically blind Hulga with a blurred view of the physical world as well. She can barely make out Manley's image as he flees across the cow pasture: "she saw his blue figure struggling successfully over the green speckled lake."¹² Recalling that the late Nietzsche sometimes identified himself with the Anti-Christ, perhaps it is not too far-fetched to imagine Pointer as Jesus walking on water—i.e., as the real Christ who has robbed her of the one thing preventing her salvation: her Nietzschean nihilism. If so, this last and lowest of O'Connor's modern (wo)men may yet be numbered among the least and last of those who enter the Kingdom.

TRUE GOVERNANCE FROM THE SOURCE OF TENDERNESS

Like no other previous Flannery O'Connor interpreter, Jerome Foss has demonstrated the perils of governing by tenderness severed from the source of tenderness. Yet the question remains: What is the location of that source and how might it govern? Foss answers obliquely yet truly when describing the body-despising Sarah Ruth Parker, the antagonist of "Parker's Back," as

¹⁰ O'Connor, *Collected Works*, 281.

¹¹ It is noteworthy that the knapsacks of all Nazi soldiers were supplied with two necessary literary items: *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and the book of John. Needless to say, the most Incarnation-centered of the four gospels had been made to count for nothing in the face of Hitler's politics of annihilation.

¹² O'Connor, *Collected Works*, 283.

denying “that God became man in the Incarnation and therefore has a body through which we can know Him and be united to Him sacramentally” (157). That Body is called the Church, of course. There Christ governs his people with the tenderness made manifest on His cross—the tough tenderness of suffering freely borne for humankind so that whosoever believes might also bear it for His sake and thus for everyone else.

Ann Hartle, *What Happened to Civility: The Promise and Failure of Montaigne's Modern Project*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022, 190 pp., \$100 (cloth).

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In this provocative book, Ann Hartle argues that civility is a modern invention—more specifically, the invention of Michel de Montaigne—and an incoherent and unstable one at that.

According to the classical tradition, man is teleologically ordered. Man, says that tradition, finds his highest fulfillment in a certain kind of life: a life that involves study and contemplation, and that is ordered, ultimately, to the divine. The rightly ordered polis makes such a pursuit possible, not least because it provides space for the leisure necessary to such pursuit. A well-ordered society is a prerequisite of the best life, but the best life transcends the political. At the same time, however, the political order has life and meaning only insofar as it sustains the highest activities: the polis needs the contemplative life just as the contemplative life needs the polis. To see man as ordered to and fulfilled by a life of contemplation and virtue is to recognize a hierarchy, a hierarchy not just between persons but between kinds of lives. It is a “master-slave” distinction of sorts, but it is a unique kind of mastery and a unique kind of servility. The “masters” care about contemplation and virtue, not about political power. According to the classical tradition, says Hartle, “the coherence of the political community depends upon the recognition of what is higher and better than the political struggle over rule; that is, it depends on religion and philosophy” (22).

Hartle argues that Michel de Montaigne is best understood as reacting against the classical tradition. Montaigne, Hartle argues, saw the classical

tradition's emphasis on the common good as a mere pretext for the mastery of the weak by the strong (22). The classical tradition claimed a concern for a common good which it was powerless to bring about. In response, Montaigne invents a "new Adam, the first man, the new man, not created by God but brought into being by his own power" (37). Rather than attempting to pursue the fulness of an already existing nature, the new Adam can impose on himself any nature he chooses. The new Adam's relation to nature is now "one of mastery and judgement, not of participation and contemplation" (39).

The first casualty of the New Adam is the natural hierarchy found in the classical tradition. If each man is the architect of his own nature, there is no more distinction to be drawn between "higher" and "lower" ways of life, no more distinction to be drawn between "masters" and "slaves." The New Adam gives up any claim to mastery; any claim to a distinction between weak and strong or master and slave: he is subject only to himself. Since all previous political systems were built on the distinction between master and slave, the New Adam needs a new polis. Representative government, under which the government serves the will of the people and where the individual is left to pursue his own version of the good, fills this need. Since each is the architect of his own good and none makes any claim to mastery, in the new polis two virtues have ascendancy: authenticity and civility. Authenticity, because when man is his own standard all that matters is that he be true to himself; and civility, because the standard he sets is *only* his own: he makes no claim to mastery. Instead of the moral virtues of tradition, the new virtues are social ones: "promise keeping, forgiveness of insults, openness, toleration, and trust." All the virtues of the new society "are about respecting the individual in his particularity and in his right to the satisfaction of his particularity" (100).

Having described the civility that constitutes the heart of Montaigne's vision, Hartle argues that it is unsustainable because it requires, paradoxically, the very tradition that Montaigne rejects. Since this is the very crux of Hartle's argument, it is worth thinking about how it is supposed to go. Montaigne's New Adam is the architect of his own particularity. He does not look to some universal standard in contemplation and wonder and he certainly does not attempt to conform himself to it or demand such conformity of anyone else. Yet—and this, I think, is a key point—Montaigne *also thinks* that the very tradition he rejects plays a key role in enabling the New Adam's authentic self-construction. Montaigne does not think that one lives an authentic life merely by following one's dominant whims. Hartle

argues that the kind of authenticity that Montaigne envisioned, the kind of authenticity that produces civility, requires *formation*: one must first subject oneself to tradition before one can rise above it and truly make it one's own. Montaigne's New Adam *needs* the very tradition he will ultimately surpass. A society that suppresses those traditions cannot provide the kind of training the New Adam needs. But—and this, I think, is Hartle's crucial claim—there is a fundamental and ultimately destructive tension between the New Adam and the traditions that form him. The New Adam, Hartle seems to argue, *will inevitably and necessarily* suppress the very free institutions that formed them. Why? The claim seems to be that there is a fundamental tension in what the New Adam does. His self-creation is an act of mastery and control: refusing to be bound by traditions that formed him, he creates himself in his own image. Yet while exercising mastery and control with respect to himself, the New Adam relinquishes mastery of anyone else. In doing so, he suppresses (or tries to suppress) his will to power, but does not extinguish it. And a will to power that is suppressed will eventually break free. Civility thus invariably gives rise to ideology and domination.

Ann Hartle has written a timely book on a timely topic, and as a leading—perhaps the leading—scholar of Michel de Montaigne, she is uniquely qualified to write it. As one might expect, such a book will be provocative and raise many questions. I will confine myself to two remarks, one about her account of the tradition that Montaigne rejects, and one about her more fundamental claim: that civility is the source of its own destruction.

Hartle argues that the fundamental virtues of the classical tradition are magnanimity and charity, and that both become degraded in the modern turn to civility. I had hoped for a fuller elaboration of this claim than Hartle offers, not least because by the end of the book it had begun to seem to me that it is really *humility* that Hartle believes is present in the classical tradition and absent in our modern world. To view the created world with an attitude of wonder, to seek to understand reality and one's place in the whole, to treat truth as something to be always pursued and never completely grasped—all of this is to have a fundamental humility with respect to oneself and one's place in the world. More than anything, it seems to me to be this that Hartle is saying the New Adam has lost. He is a self-creator, and if he holds back from the attempt to impose his will on others, it is not out of any fundamental humility, but only out of self-control. If it is indeed *humility* that Hartle thinks our modern world lacks, then I agree. But I am also not sure that all the blame for its absence can be laid at the feet of Montaigne.

At the beginning of *What Happened to Civility*, Hartle rightly reminds us of Pieper's distinction between the servile and the free. Pieper insists that activities that are genuinely free, be they religion or philosophy or artistic endeavor or anything else, do not begin with some pre-set end in view. To the extent that religion or education or anything else seeks to produce something specific, such as an individual with a certain set of opinions, it becomes servile rather than free. If we take this claim seriously—as I think we should—then we get a twofold consequence. First, because it is ordered to forming souls for the pursuit of truth and not to indoctrinating them in a fixed set of opinions, a tradition that is genuinely alive and free in Pieper's sense will always, from time to time, produce a Michel de Montaigne or a René Descartes or a Friedrich Nietzsche or a Karl Marx. To form rather than indoctrinate is always to take a risk that the individual, once formed, will throw off the tradition that formed it. But traditions that are free in Pieper's sense do not *primarily* produce such people. A great many more of those formed for the pursuit of truth embrace the traditions that formed them and advance and develop those traditions in creative and vibrant ways. This is how traditions grow and live. If all this is correct, though, then I do not see why the trajectory of liberal society need be what Hartle says it is.

Montaigne *recognizes* the need for formation in tradition; for the existence of institutions that are free in Pieper's sense. Such institutions, insofar as they produce Pieper's genuinely free seekers of truth, ought by their very existence provide a counterweight to the New Adams. Perhaps most importantly, it seems to me that for a long time those institutions *did* provide that counterweight. However suspect its origin, liberal society *did* allow free institutions to flourish, and for a long time. Doubters need only consider university syllabi from a century (or two) ago, or read a student newspaper. This is all to say that, much as I appreciate Hartle's insightful analysis, I think there are other and deeper sources of our modern ills.

While reading *What Happened to Civility?* I happened to be simultaneously rereading Zena Hitz's excellent book *Lost in Thought*. Hitz reminds us that "lovers of learning in fact seek after reality, more and more of it. Infused with seriousness, they seek to get to the bottom of life, to happiness, to joy in the truth—or just plain truth, if there is no joy of it."¹ Like Hartle, Hitz thinks that ideology poses a threat to educational institutions and the intellectual life. But Hitz presents the problem a bit differently, and sees those problems

¹ Zena Hitz, *Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 191.

as arising from a more pervasive source. For Hitz, the problem is “the trap of educating by opinion,” a trap that she thinks presents as much of a danger to the bearers of tradition as to anyone else. It is a trap as old as time, and its sources are manifold: they are pride and greed and envy and sloth and every other human vice. It is our very human nature that gets in the way of the pursuit of truth; in the way of inquiry that is free in Pieper’s sense. It gets in the way from within traditions and it gets in the way from without them.

Humility is something that Montaigne’s New Adam, having had the audacity to create himself in his own image, will inevitably struggle with. But, *especially* if we take seriously the idea of a universal human nature, even more especially if we take seriously the idea of a universal human nature forever stained by sin, it presents a problem for us all.

Rasoul Namazi, *Leo Strauss and Islamic Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022, 350 pp., \$99.99 (hardcover).

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Whatever else may ail the contemporary university, the place of Leo Strauss in it now seems all but assured. Books and articles about him have proliferated, to the point where only experts on this thought can keep up. Once the preserve of a few devoted disciples, Strauss has begun to take his place in the canon along with the classic authors whose books he did so much to explore and reinvigorate. Strauss's newly acquired respectability hardly suffices to overcome the challenges inherent in the study of his thought. In addition to his complex and often enigmatic writing style, the vast extent of his learning, reflected in the dozens of authors on which he wrote, cannot easily be swallowed whole. It may therefore be better to begin by studying him piecemeal. Rasoul Namazi's excellent study, written in an English style superior to that of most native speakers, exemplifies this approach. His careful, focused, and thoughtful examination of Strauss's writing on Islamic thought could very easily inspire other valuable books, such as "Strauss on Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, and the Founding of Modern Liberalism" or "Strauss on French Political Philosophy, from Montaigne to Rousseau."

The significance of the book is heightened by the relative paucity of previous work on its subject. While the study of the *falāsifa*, by Strauss's own testimony, played a seminal role in his philosophical development, scholars have thus far made only modest efforts to probe it. Namazi has clearly benefited from that scholarship: he combines Steven Lenzner's careful reading of Strauss, Daniel Tanguay's general knowledge of his intellectual biography, and Steven Harvey's familiarity with Arabic and Islamic philosophy. The result is a book that consummates the best efforts of its predecessors.

Namazi's book is highly recommended. In the hope that you will read it yourselves, I provide no more than a bare summary of its contents, along with some remarks on the issues it raises. Namazi begins with a compressed but competent intellectual biography, recounting Strauss's gradual turn to Islamic political thought (1–22). He proceeds to refute, with unusual patience, views of Islamic philosophy that underappreciate Strauss, distinguishing those written in good faith from those that are not (22–41). Namazi also addresses the view, prevalent today but rejected by Strauss, that these philosophers never read a genuine Platonic dialogue, even in translation: undemonstrated, indemonstrable, and contrary to the claims of the *falāsifa* themselves, Namazi fitly calls this idea “possible like many other incredible things” (63–66, 166–73). He then turns to the four most important mature works by Strauss on Islamic political thought: two substantial articles on Alfarabi's Platonic writings, and rough, unpublished notes on Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's “Republic”* and *Arabian Nights*.

The probity of relying on an author's private notes will always be questioned, especially when more public sources are available. Unfortunately, such notes constitute the only source for Strauss's views on Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's “Republic”* and the *Arabian Nights*, so Namazi can hardly be faulted for making full use of them. On the basis of ten pages of notes, circulating among scholars for years but published here for the first time (205–15), Namazi manages to craft an extensive and persuasive interpretation of Strauss's view of Averroes. His success owes a lot to his ability to fit these notes into a broader account of Strauss's treatment of the *falāsifa* in general and Alfarabi in particular (59–63, 206). In Namazi's reading, Strauss proposes a distinctive approach to the commentary as a whole, in which Averroes emerges as a worthy companion and sometimes critic of Plato, rather than, as so many scholars seem to think, a faulty transmitter of him (63–68, 75–77). Strauss's brief and often enigmatic notes manage to cover many familiar themes, such as the size of the political community, the meaning of courage, the necessity of lying, and the conflict between revealed law and philosophy (68–85). Even so, Namazi confesses that any interpretation of such rough notes is bound to be tentative: in reading this section, we begin to wish that Strauss had found the time and occasion to develop them into a finished lecture or article (56–57).

Namazi's treatment of Strauss's notes on the *Arabian Nights* is not quite as compelling, but I doubt whether this reflects any failure on his part. While Strauss's numerous published writings on medieval and Platonic philosophy

can help anchor his notes on Averroes, no comparable guide exists for his equally rough notes on the *Arabian Nights*. Namazi suggests some fruitful comparisons with Strauss's Montesquieu and Aristophanes (92–93; cf. 192–93), but does not really pursue either: here, the difficulty of acquiring intimate knowledge of every thinker on whom Strauss wrote begins to show. Namazi concludes by arguing that the combination of theological radicalism and political moderation ties Strauss's work on the *Arabian Nights* to his work on Alfarabi (116–17). This sounds plausible, although more could be said about the implication of the vast difference in form and content between these two landmarks of medieval Arabic literature. Finally, Strauss's work is subject to a grave philological question, which Namazi explains but does not resolve. Strauss's own devoted pupil Muhsin Mahdi would later produce a pioneering edition of the *Arabian Nights* that excludes as later additions many of the stories from the Calcutta edition on which Strauss relies. Given how sensitive Strauss is to matters of numerology and form, this new edition would put so many of his notes into such grave doubt that perhaps it is better that he never published them. Despite these uncertainties, Namazi's account of the state of scholarship on the work is vivid and informative (84–91). He also manages to convey Strauss's view of the "Nights as a serious literary work containing essential observations on religion and politics" (96). So while I would not describe this chapter as entirely satisfying, it is certainly worthwhile, and perhaps a spur to future research.

The second half of Namazi's book is devoted to readings of Strauss's two mature, published articles on Alfarabi. Namazi highlights with impressive lucidity the various writing techniques rediscovered by Strauss, including repetition, contradiction, ambiguous statements attributed to various sources, and numbers. He also attempts to make sense of the articles as a whole. In this regard, the chapter on "Farabi's *Plato*" is particularly successful. Namazi gradually uncovers some underlying purposes behind the odd combination of bold statements and careful prevarications that characterize Strauss's account. In Namazi's painstaking reading, Strauss's sweeping claims about Alfarabi's unbelief serve to catch the attention of the reader, who is eventually led to a more measured and less dogmatic view of Alfarabi's philosophical skepticism: "the work of commentary is not unlike philosophy itself, in which the questions are more evident than the answers" (158–59). Namazi also speculates intelligently about why this article, despite its obvious merits, was never republished in other collections in anything resembling its original form. Perhaps "this very personal and *unique* writing of Strauss" was meant to be kept as a unicorn, which "depicts more authentically Strauss's genuine

positions than those *repeated* statements of his” (145)? Namazi concludes the chapter by noting that Strauss’s “free use” of the article in the introduction to *Persecution and the Art of Writing* omits many of the most provocative and “personal” statements of the original (159–61).

Namazi’s treatment of Strauss’s second major article on Alfarabi, “How Farabi Read Plato’s *Laws*,” is less definitive. Namazi describes this piece as “one of the most difficult studies Strauss ever wrote” (161), a claim that can be doubted only because of the strength of the competition. Following the procedure used in “Farabi’s *Plato*,” Namazi divides the essay into paragraphs and attempts to make sense of its contents. In so doing, he makes use of some headings describing the intention of each paragraph that Strauss left in his notes (247–48). Namazi’s observations are fruitful and abundant, but they do not always lead to the promised conclusion. For example, he hopes to eventually connect his analysis with Strauss’s final work on Plato’s *Laws*, but as far as I can tell never gets around to doing so (162–63; cf. 186–87). He shows how Strauss regards the *Summary* as a work of *kalam*, but does not consider Strauss’s references to Alfarabi’s critique of *kalam* (183–87; Strauss, “How Farabi Read Plato’s *Laws*,” 143). His final section is titled, aptly and honestly, “an unfinished task” (201–3). He observes there that Strauss himself claims to have acquired some knowledge of how to read the *Summary*, but less about Alfarabi’s specific views on the religious situation of his time.

If Strauss struggled to understand Alfarabi’s work, what may we reasonably expect from ourselves? The *Summary of Plato’s “Laws”* is still widely acknowledged to be among his most impenetrable works (166–67). But how much does this matter for our interpretation of Strauss? Some interpreters of Strauss focus more on Strauss himself, others on the authors to whom he often seems to direct his readers’ attention. Perhaps these two approaches are not mutually exclusive: just as Alfarabi and Averroes remain valuable both for what they teach us about Plato and Aristotle, and for what they accomplished as philosophers in their own right, so Strauss can be at the same time cherished as both a master interpreter and original philosopher. As Strauss’s own reputation has soared, there has been a greater tendency to write on Strauss himself. Namazi benefits from a more solid background in Islamic thought than many who have written on this topic, but in the end, his study mostly follows the prevailing practice. This points to some unfinished business, characteristic of all good works of scholarship. Inevitably, one cannot fully assess Strauss’s work without independently assessing the work on

which he writes, any more than one can understand Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* without deep knowledge of the original.

In the case of Alfarabi's and Averroes's greatest Platonic works, we still lack the materials for such an assessment. Namazi notes, with a certain tinge of irony, that the *Philosophy of Plato* is generally viewed as "a very minor treatise," on which "no detailed monographs have been written" (119; cf. 57). As for Averroes's *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* "very few in-depth studies have been written on any aspect on this unique writing" (57). Joshua Parens's valuable work on the *Summary of Plato's "Laws,"* now a generation old, has not really been followed up. I myself have joined the fray, writing an article on the *Philosophy of Plato* published in an earlier issue of this journal, and editing the first anthology, with Namazi's valued participation, on Averroes's *Commentary*. In this respect, one has to say that Strauss's efforts on behalf of the *falāsifa* have only partially succeeded. Future efforts in this direction need to consider, among other things, all of Strauss's copious references to these texts. The interpretation of these Platonic works of the *falāsifa* and the study of the commentaries on them by Strauss therefore go hand in hand. By providing so thorough and convincing an interpretation of Strauss, Namazi's work advances both of these worthy endeavors.

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