Leo Strauss

Natural Right

A course offered in the winter quarter, 1954

Department of Political Science, The University of Chicago

Edited by Jerry Weinberger

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With assistance from Brian Bitar and Stephanie Ahrens

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Table of Contents[i]

Note on the Leo Strauss Transcript Project	i-ii
Editorial Headnote	ii-iii
Editor's Introduction	iv-vi
Session 1: Political Science, Political Theory, Political Philosophy	1-16
Session 2: The History of Political Philosophy	17-37
Session 3: On David Easton and Others	38-52
Session 4: Historicism (fragment)	53-57
Session 5: On Karl Mannheim, George Sabine, and Carl Becker	58-75
Session 6: More on Historicism	76-94
Session 6A and 7A: From Nature to Thomas Paine	95-119
Session 7: Thomas Paine continued	120-133
Session 8: Still More on Thomas Paine	134-148
Session 9: Natural Right: Machiavelli and Hobbes	149-160
Session 10: From Rousseau to Burke	161-171
Session 10A: Burke on Natural Right (fragment)	172-180
Session 11: Burke and Tocqueville on America and the French Revolution	181-198
Session 12: Rousseau, Burke, Hegel, and Marx	199-216
Session 13: On *The Communist Manifesto*	217-236
Session 14: From Marx to Nietzsche	237-247
Session 15: Nietzsche contra Marx	248-262

[i] See the Editorial Headnote for an explanation of the sequence of sessions and the fragments.

Session 16: The Will to Power 263-278

The Leo Strauss Transcript Project

Leo Strauss is well known as a thinker and writer, but he also had tremendous impact as a teacher. In the transcripts of his courses one can see Strauss comment on texts, including many he wrote little or nothing about, and respond generously to student questions and objections. The transcripts, amounting to more than twice the volume of Strauss's published work, will add immensely to the material available to scholars and students of Strauss's work.

In the early 1950s mimeographed typescripts of student notes of Strauss's courses were distributed among his students. In winter 1954, the first recording, of his course on Natural Right, was transcribed and distributed to students. Professor Herbert J. Storing obtained a grant from the Relm Foundation to support the taping and transcription, which resumed on a regular basis in the winter of 1956 with Strauss's course "Historicism and Modern Relativism." Of the 39 courses Strauss taught at the University of Chicago from 1958 until his departure in 1968, 34 were recorded and transcribed. After he retired from Chicago, recording of his courses continued at Claremont Men's College in the spring of 1968 and the fall and spring of 1969 (although the tapes for his last two courses there have not been located), and at St. John's College for the four years until his death in October 1973.

The surviving original audio recordings vary widely in quality and completeness, and after they had been transcribed, the audiotapes were sometimes reused, leaving the audio record very incomplete. Beginning in the late 1990s, Stephen Gregory, then the administrator of the University's John M. Olin Center for Inquiry into the Theory and Practice of Democracy funded by the John M. Olin Foundation, initiated the digital remastering of the surviving tapes by Craig Harding of September Media to ensure their preservation, improve their audibility, and make possible their eventual publication. This remastering received financial support from the Olin Center and from the Division of Preservation and Access of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The remastered audiofiles are available at the Strauss Center website: https://leostrausscenter.uchicago.edu/courses.

Strauss permitted the taping and transcribing to go forward, but he did not check the transcripts or otherwise participate in the project. Accordingly, Strauss's close associate and colleague Joseph Cropsey originally put the copyright in his own name, though he assigned copyright to the Estate of Leo Strauss in 2008. Beginning in 1958 a headnote was placed at the beginning of each transcript, which read: "This transcription is a written record of essentially oral material, much of which developed spontaneously in the classroom and none of which was prepared with publication in mind. The transcription is made available to a limited number of interested persons, with the understanding that no use will be made of it that is inconsistent with the private and partly informal origin of the material. Recipients are emphatically requested not to seek to increase the circulation of the transcription. This transcription has not been checked, seen, or passed on by the lecturer." In 2008, Strauss's heir, his daughter Jenny Strauss, asked Nathan Tarcov to succeed Joseph Cropsey as Strauss's literary executor. They agreed that because of the widespread circulation of the old, often inaccurate and incomplete transcripts and the continuing interest in Strauss's thought and teaching, it would be a service to interested scholars and students to proceed with publication of the remastered audiofiles and transcripts. They were

encouraged by the fact that Strauss himself signed a contract with Bantam Books to publish four of the transcripts although in the end none were published.

The University's Leo Strauss Center, established in 2008, launched a project, presided over by its director Nathan Tarcov, and managed by Stephen Gregory, to correct the old transcripts on the basis of the remastered audiofiles as they became available, transcribe those audiofiles not previously transcribed, and annotate and edit for readability all the transcripts including those for which no audiofiles survived. This project was supported by grants from the Winiarski Family Foundation, Mr. Richard S. Shiffrin and Mrs. Barbara Z. Schiffrin, Earhart Foundation, and the Hertog Foundation, and contributions from numerous other donors. The Strauss Center was ably assisted in its fundraising efforts by Nina Botting-Herbst and Patrick McCusker, staff in the Office of the Dean of the Division of the Social Sciences at the University.

Senior scholars familiar with both Strauss's work and the texts he taught were commissioned as editors, with preliminary work done in most cases by student editorial assistants. The goal in editing the transcripts has been to preserve Strauss's original words as much as possible while making the transcripts easier to read. Strauss's impact (and indeed his charm) as a teacher is revealed in the sometimes informal character of his remarks. Readers should make allowance for the oral character of the transcripts. There are careless phrases, slips of the tongue, repetitions, and possible mistranscriptions. However enlightening the transcripts are, they cannot be regarded as the equivalent of works that Strauss himself wrote for publication.

Nathan Tarcov
Editor-in-Chief

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Editorial Headnote

This course was a lecture course. The primary authors discussed were David Easton, Karl Mannheim, George Sabine, Carl Becker, Thomas Paine, Tocqueville, Marx, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Nietzsche. We do not know what texts were assigned.

There are no surviving audiotapes of this course. This transcript is based upon the original transcript, made by persons unknown to us, which can be consulted in the Leo Strauss archive in Special Collections at the University of Chicago Library. The transcript is incomplete; fragments or portions of lectures are identified in the session heading and in footnotes. In a preface to the table of contents, Herbert Storing wrote:

"The sequence and numbering are based on bits of evidence here and there throughout the lectures. I am fairly confident that at least the sequence is right, but there may be mistakes . . . It

appears that we have parts, at least, of all lectures given, but throughout there are fragments (sometimes large fragments) missing and now lost . . . Please remember that these lectures were transcribed by a number of different people and under bad conditions. In transcribing some tapes newly unearthed I was able to check parts of transcriptions already made, and I was struck by the number of errors. (I have done a corrected version of fragment 13A and a list of corrections of parts of 11B-12) The probability of important omissions and errors which affect the meaning of what was said must be kept constantly in mind when reading these lectures."

The transcribers left many blank spaces in the transcript, sometimes with question marks, evidently indicating that the tape was inaudible. We have rendered all such spaces with ellipses in square brackets: [. . .]. Ellipses that appear in the transcript are preserved without brackets. The transcribers note in many cases that the student questions were "not recorded," which we have shown as "**Student:** [. . .]"

The session titles were devised by the editor.

The transcript was edited by Jerry Weinberger, with assistance from Brian Bitar and Stephanie Ahrens.

Editor's Introduction
Jerry Weinberger

Leo Strauss taught this lecture course on Natural Right in the spring quarter of 1954, shortly after the publication of *Natural Right and History* in 1953. There is no audiotape of the course, and the existing transcript was in poor shape and even close to incoherent in important places. It's both interesting and important nevertheless, at least partly for what Strauss had to say about teaching political philosophy in American universities. At the outset, Strauss says that the course is aimed at future young professors whose political science departments will require them to teach lecture courses on "The Isms" (sessions 1, 2). (That was true for this editor: I was hired at my career-long institution precisely to teach a lecture course called "The Isms.") Strauss makes it clear that such courses are mere bowls for professorial porridge and not serious endeavors in the teaching of political philosophy. *Engaging* in political philosophy is far beyond the capacities of almost all intelligent people, but the serious *study* of political philosophy can be done more widely, says Strauss, but only in a seminar, and in that only on one book by one great thinker. So this course on "The Isms" was a gift from Strauss to his academically-hopeful graduate students.

This said, the course was also a gift to unknown undergraduate students, for whom Strauss at the end of the course outlined a project for a book of "about two hundred pages" with the "help" of "a dozen younger men." This textbook would devote each one of its chapters "to one of the great political philosophers and doing nothing but to state the most elementary, unquestionable, and evident things about what he set out to do, how he approached the fundamental political question, and what the [. . .][i] No sauce, no custard of any kind—sociological, psychological, or whatnot—permitted. In [present-day] textbooks, I think you get an infinite amount of custard and very little meat" (session 16). That sauce-less textbook—known familiarly as "Strauss-Cropsey"[ii] by all of the professors who use and refer to it—is as much or more for them as it is for their undergraduate students.

But this lecture course is useful for more than these personal reasons. It has at its center a clear, compelling, and concise account of the five fundamental differences between premodern and modern natural right, the latter of which Thomas Paine's version is "the most extreme expression" (session 8). An individual's possession of a natural right is a ticket to participation in and protection by a political association. And as such, "natural" right is a ticket to the best possible political association. Modern or "natural public or constitutional" right differs from its premodern counterpart in being a doctrine of political legitimacy that is operable always and everywhere: it stipulates at once the best and the only legitimate form of government (session 8). Premodern natural right, on the contrary, distinguished between the best and the legitimate forms of government in holding that the best political order can be impossible under certain conditions and hence "fatal" if pursued. Aside from tyranny, "all kinds of imperfect regimes are possible depending on circumstances" (session 8). So much for the first difference.

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[i] The ellipses here indicate that part of the audiotape was inaudible.
[ii] Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, eds., *History of Political Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). [First published 1963]

The second difference follows from the first: unlike premodern natural right, the modern form is "revolutionary" (session 8). As a single standard of legitimacy it renders all other political orders illegitimate. Both modern and premodern natural right discern the best or true political order, but premodern natural right allowed for prudence "to tailor what is possible in practical circumstances." Put otherwise, says Strauss, modern natural right differs from its premodern counterpart in being "doctrinaire" (session 8).

The third difference is the "form in which natural right is presented" (session 8). Premodern natural right consisted of statements by Roman or canon lawyers occurring in treatises on positive law or theology. Modern natural right was from the outset treated as a topic completely separate from considerations of positive law and theology—so much so that Protestant universities in Europe established professorial chairs in natural right. And as such "an independent and separate discipline," modern natural right became deductive and geometric (session 8). We see this most clearly in the works of Spinoza, Hobbes, and Locke. By the mid-eighteenth century, says Strauss, the German historian Gierke could say "natural law was treated as the code of laws taught by reason, whereas the positive law was thought to be a system of ordinances issued for its enforcement" (session 8).

The fourth difference is the derivation of modern natural right from a presocial or even prerational "state of nature" in which men live (as Locke says) "without a common superior on earth" (session 8). Strauss argues that the state of nature in modern natural right is a reinterpretation of the Christian state of grace that preceded the Fall. For Christianity divine authority is coeval with both situations of mankind, but for modern natural right the state of nature is characterized by the absence of any authority beyond the isolated individual's own power to defend her natural right to private property (and hence natural right to food) against the predations of others. Strauss argues that the modern notion of a state of nature is altogether novel, and that even Grotius in the seventeenth century understood it in its premodern and Christian sense of grace.

The fifth difference concerns the relation of duties and rights. In premodern natural right, "right . . . defines primarily man's duties, the rights being derived from the duties" (session 8). In modern natural right, by contrast, duties are derivative from the rights. What Strauss means here is that in modern natural right, rights are absolute but duties are not. If you have a right to your food, I have a duty to let you have it: but not if it means that I have to starve to death so that you do not. Self-preservation, in other words, always trumps duty. It is for this reason, says Strauss, that the scholar of Thomas Aquinas, A. P. D'Entrèves, "makes it clear [that] there are no natural rights in Thomas Aquinas except by implication" (session 8).

In broad outline, the course tells the story of the turn from ancient to modern politics and political thought that Strauss detailed in *Natural Right and History*: Premodern natural right—the product primarily of Plato and Aristotle—was concerned with the question of the best regime and its production of justice and the moral virtue of a noble few. This best regime was a monarchy, the second-best was a mix of warrior aristocrats and the middling men of commerce, and full-blown democracy was but one step above the worst regime: tyranny. With criteria such as these, for premodern natural right the actual occurrence of the best regime was a matter of chance. That uncertainty was rejected by the first and most important father of modern natural

right: Machiavelli. To assure the actuality of the best regime, Machiavelli rejected the standard of moral virtue to remedy the inevitable harsh necessities of real political life and recommended that it's better to assume that men are more like devils than angels, simply because that's what men really are. On this assumption, the best to be expected from well-founded government is individual self-preservation and the humble and individual pursuit of easygoing happiness.

The course of modern natural right, as it flowed from Machiavelli, runs straight to the "Isms." Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, the most important theorists of modern liberal and representative government, wrote in direct opposition to the religious fanaticism of the English civil war and the controversies that followed it. Both argued that legitimate political sovereignty sprang from individuals who, in a state of nature wracked by a war of all against all, lay down their natural right to self-preservation—but never transfer it—to enable a single authority to use that right for the security of all. Hobbes called this authority "Leviathan," because it had to be absolute (so too for Locke, but in a more muted formulation). Strauss points out that we cannot understand Hobbes and Locke without understanding the crucial fact that the blood running through the veins of the Leviathan is green: its "blood is money" (session 12). In other words, liberal political sovereignty enables citizens to mind their own business, and that business is not politics or war but business and the comforts that money can buy. Strauss thus says that in the first formulation of modern natural right its fundamental principle was "economism."

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, says Strauss, was the first to object to the low moral standards of economism. In his *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, Rousseau argued that cultivating the sciences, a premier concern of economism, is harmful to our moral qualities. And to this Strauss adds that Rousseau's concept of the General Will was the first step in the turn from natural right to history as the source of the best political order. Kant also argued that the blind forces of history—struggle and war—would paradoxically lead to perpetual peace. Hegel's philosophy of history claimed to demonstrate that the best political order is an ultimate necessity of history. But all this was obviated by the advent of positivism: the doctrine that only facts and not values are knowable and that "matters of natural rights are meaningless questions" because they "cannot be answered by natural science" (session 1). As regards history, each historical human situation is ultimately blind and inaccessible to all the others. The effect of positivism was to enshrine "historicism" as the doctrine that revealed the timebound, or merely historical and relativistic, character of positivism. The "Ism" historicism is the graveyard of positivism *and* of both modern and premodern natural right.

Session 1: January 6, 1954
Political Science, Political Theory, Political Philosophy

Leo Strauss: [In progress] —because I think the teachers in graduate schools have a certain obligation to help those of you who want to teach later on in colleges as to how you could present subjects of this kind at the college level. I am not aware of the fact that there is an "isms" course given in this department, but quite a few of you will be forced to teach such courses very soon. That this is not merely a hodgepodge of two entirely different things, natural right and the "isms," will easily appear[1] [as] we go. The question of the "isms," properly understood, leads us back necessarily to the question of natural right, however that question might be decided. Can a denial of natural right be considered a solution of the problem of natural right?

Now the term "natural right" which I chose is a term which arouses emotion, as I very well know, emotions of approval and disapproval. That has an advantage, contrary to what certain people think, because we need something which arouses us out of the slumber of academic routine. That slumber expresses itself in the use of terms which dull our perceptions. The most relevant term of this kind is the term "values," which we can all hear all the time without thinking or feeling anything about it . . . Now natural right is not a term of this kind. It does not belong to an academic routine, at least within our world. There is a tradition of natural right, no doubt, which is still powerful within our age, especially among Catholic circles. But the term which is used by Thomists is natural law. For a number of reasons, one of which is to deviate a bit from *too* common usage, I suggest the term "natural right." But there are more substantial reasons, as we shall see later.

Now we might say that the element of academic life ought to be detachment and not emotion. That is true. Yet what does detachment mean? Attention, seriousness, interestedness. And therefore detachment has an emotional quality, to use this term. Or we might also say that detachment is not a state in which we find ourselves without making any efforts, without being aroused. Detachment is attachment of a kind: attachment to the truth. And assuming for a moment, and it is a prudent assumption, that we do not now possess the truth, detachment would then be passionate concern with the quest for truth, with the problems. A *passionate* concern. If we are lukewarm and indifferent, then we are not really detached; we only pretend detachment.

Natural right is our theme as a problem. In fact, natural right is the fundamental problem of the social sciences, or political science in particular. One cannot understand political or social matters properly without becoming concerned with the question as to what justice is. And natural right means nothing but justice, with one specification: *natural* right, justice insofar as it is not a creation of man. That is the only meaning we need for the time being. I am doubtful whether it is a special virtue to avoid controversial statements, because it is hardly possible to speak about any interesting subject without making controversial statements, but it is certainly wise to begin with statements that are not too controversial. Therefore I will explain my statement that natural right is the fundamental problem of the social sciences. Or let me state it noncontroversially, less

controversially: Natural right is the problem of political philosophy. But then of course we have to answer the question: What is political philosophy? We know that there are political things and that their study is worthwhile. We call that study *political science*. Political science consists of parts, as you can see from the announcement of this department. One of these parts is called political theory. Here at the University of Chicago, political theory is regarded as central. You know that you can make outside substitutes for any other part of political science requirements, except for theory. Now what is political theory? Political theory has today the tendency to be treated in the form of *history* of political theory. At any rate, reading of certain old books is regarded as essential for the study of political theory. But is political theory the same as political philosophy? If I understand the usage correctly, political theory is preferred because that appears to be more close to science. You have theoretical parts also in physics or economics, and there is nothing dangerous in theory. The assumption underlying this usage is that there is a fundamental difference between science and philosophy. And science may very well have, apart from its empirical parts, theoretical parts.

Now what is there in political philosophy insofar as it is not identical with political theory thus understood? The general answer which you would hear today, I believe, is that political philosophy consists of nonscientific statements about values. I believe I am producing the common opinion fairly. Now this is of course a very vague statement, because political philosophy does not deal with all values for the simple reason that most values are politically irrelevant, so it is really better to specify those values or that value which is really essential to political philosophy: and that is *justice*. Now justice, it is safe to say again, is the social virtue in an emphatic sense. For us to clarify justice, we have of course to investigate society. We have to raise the question: What is society? Is society an accident, a convenience, or a necessity? And other questions of this kind. At any rate, the question of justice is inseparable from the question of what society is, and therefore it is absolutely impossible to limit political philosophy to a study of values as distinguished from facts. This separation cannot be accepted.

Let us start again from the most elementary and trivial thing: Let us assume that we do not know—or rather, let us *not* assume that we *do* know what political philosophy, or political theory, or political science is, except something which is undeniable: that they claim to be particular kinds of knowledge of political things. And let us see first what that means, knowledge of political things in the most elementary sense. Now political things have, obviously, a different relation to knowledge of them than, say, minerals. Minerals can exist without there being any knowledge of minerals—at least we believe that makes sense—but there cannot be political things without some knowledge of them. Government which is not *known* to be the government is not the government. That doesn't mean that all political things have this character. Political scientists sometimes speak of trends, and it is obviously not necessary that trends be *known* in order to be trends. But it is also true that we cannot know such political things which are not essentially known except by starting from those phenomena which are essentially known: state, government, law, and such things. We speak of political life and mean by that the life of men living in political society, and especially if they are especially concerned with politics. Political life necessarily implies political knowledge or political understanding, which means knowledge or understanding of political things. On this level of everyday political life, we make already a distinction between knowledge and opinion. For example, we *know* how the last elections went; we can only have opinions as to how the elections of '54 will go. Regarding certain things, we

have perhaps no way of getting knowledge about them: we can only opine, guess, and whatnot. But still in many cases we cannot leave it at opinion about political things or political opinion: we *need* knowledge, and the most simple proof of that is the institution called "intelligence," meaning we have to know something about what Malenkov[i] is out for. We have guesses, but if we could really know what he thought, it would be most important, and that of course applies to less spectacular matters. All political life is guided by both knowledge and opinion, but in such a way that we necessarily strive, especially in important matters, to replace political opinion by political knowledge. Now this is essential to political life and therefore exists at all times; and very much of what is now called political science is nothing but political knowledge of this nature, meaning something absolutely respectable and absolutely necessary but in principle nothing more than what intelligent members of a society will know by looking around.

Still, there is obviously a difference between this kind of political knowledge and what we now call political science. The question is: What is the reason for this? I would suggest this answer. The character of the society in which we live makes necessary different procedures in order to acquire that political knowledge which we need in order to live in that society. What do I mean? This society in which we live is sometimes called a dynamic mass society. At its opposite pole would be a static, small society. Now in a static, small society it is possible for men even in responsible positions to acquire the most important information they need for living in the society and managing its affairs while they go, while they grow up. Certain wise maxims[2] [for] handling matters which they learn from their grandfathers or great-grandfathers are as good now as they were a hundred and fifty years ago, because no radical change has taken place. Furthermore, it is a small society. In important cases everyone can act, for instance in an election, on the basis of personal knowledge of candidates and other things of this kind. If a society is so complex and [changing] so much[3] that these ordinary macroscopic methods of finding one's bearings are not sufficient, special procedures are needed, and they account for much of what we call political science today. But strictly speaking, even these modifications in procedures and in techniques and so on which are needed do not yet make political knowledge, scientific knowledge. Knowledge does not become scientific merely by the use of certain techniques. These techniques could be used in all kinds of investigations. They only mean that you try to get a higher degree of exactness or completeness than you would otherwise have. But that is not in itself the essence of science. The scientific approach emerges from the prescientific approach only by a radical change of orientation.

Now what is the difference between the prescientific knowledge or understanding and the scientific one? What is that new attitude which must arise so that there will be a scientific approach? In all prescientific orientation regarding political knowledge, the center of reference, we may say, is the here and now. There are always specific problems with which people are confronted: specific neighbors, specific individuals, even, members of their society. If they have to find out about other nations, about other times, the reference is always to the here and now. In all past practice that is so. A scientific approach emerges only when the orientation is no longer by the here and now, but by what? Well, let us just replace the here and now by its opposite, by *always and everywhere*. What does that mean? If, for example, you look at the current practice in political science, you see quite obviously that there is preference for the here and now—perfectly

[i] Georgy Malenkov (1902-1988) succeeded Stalin as premier and first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and served in that role from 1953-55.

legitimately, of course, but this is a sign that this approach is not strictly speaking scientific. It is much more a matter of practical wisdom, as it was formerly called, than of science.

Now what are these things which are everywhere and always? Well, we would say there is always something like government, like law, like war. There are other political phenomena which are not everywhere and always, e.g., democracy, representative government, and such things. But here we imply that these things which are not everywhere and always—democracy, party system, etc.—have to be understood ultimately in light of what is everywhere and always, and only to the extent to which we do that do we shift from a prescientific orientation to a scientific one. We may state it also as follows: that all political knowledge or political understanding as we may have it in actual life rests on certain premises or presuppositions which hardly become a theme of reflection in prescientific thought. The classic formulation for this question was found by Socrates, the question: *What is*? We speak all the time of Cold War, war: What is war? This question is never a serious practical question because we *feel* war; we can easily tell war from nonwar for practical purposes. And yet questions arise. International lawyers are forced to try to give definitions of war, but they still serve a limited practical purpose and do not exhaust the problem. Take law: the same difficulty arises. But to simplify this question, we can limit ourselves to the most general question which we certainly must raise. We speak of political things; and when we speak of political science, however we might understand it, we imply that there are political things as distinguished from things which are not political. We have therefore some understanding as ordinary men that there is something specifically political, but we don't have to clarify it in most cases because everyone knows that a children's party is not a political event as an election is. But still, people who want to be scientists cannot afford the luxury [of] not[4] [raising] these questions; and therefore we may say that the most *comprehensive* question which the political scientist must raise is the question of what is political.

Now this question is an indispensable one if we want to be exact and scientific. But if we think about it for a moment (I shall take this up again on a later occasion), we see that this investigation, which is the most fundamental investigation for political scientists, is not "scientific." [It] cannot be. No method of the kind which we use and which we call emphatically scientific—say, statistics, or public opinion polls, or what have you—can be of any possible use for answering the question of what is political. And yet this question which by its very nature doesn't allow of "scientific" treatment is at the very basis of political science, however understood. There was an old term used for this kind of investigation, applied to such matters as "What is political?" or "What is law?" Does any one of you know that? Well, how would you proceed if you were to take up the question What is political? Dialectics. Yes, that is the word; that is the word which they use. We just try to spell out what we mean by it, and the first attempt will of course be very crude and inadequate; and then we talk to somebody else about it, and he says that you overlooked this and this. And then you go on and on and sometimes we look at books, even, because that is a kind of dialogue of dead people. And then perhaps we reach a point maybe where we can say we *know* really what they mean when they use the word "political." And maybe we do not reach such a simple answer.

Now at any rate, I believe that we have here a common ground with everyone in political science, that this is the most fundamental question. But how to proceed? Now the word "political" is not originally an English term, as you know. It is derived from a Greek word called

polis. Political means what is related to the *polis*, and *polis* means the city. The city. We do not have cities any more in that sense. The cities of London and New York are not cities of this kind. The modern equivalent to that, and a very inadequate equivalent, is the word "state." It is inadequate because when we speak of "state" we imply a distinction between state and society, and this distinction is totally absent from the original notion of *polis*. So we use therefore a very poor substitute for *polis* and say[5] "political society" in order to avoid all these complexities. Political society will of course comprise both the *polis* and the state, and we assume when we speak of political society that we know at least this much: that this is an important kind of human association. The question then is: What is a political society? If we raise this question we are forced sooner or later to consider the *perfect* association.

I will now merely assert that it is impossible to answer the question of what a political society is without answering the question of what are its purposes. Now we see perhaps from our own political experience, or else if we have some knowledge of different cultures and different times, that there is a variety of such purposes. And this variety of purposes is of crucial importance for the understanding of political life. We may say that human life in general is activity directed toward goals. If that is so, social life would be activities directed toward goals to be pursued by society. Now then in order to pursue specific goals, society must be organized in accordance with a specific goal which society adopts. This organization of society with a view toward specific goals shows itself most clearly in its *government*, government now understood in the sense in which we say "form of government," what kind of government it is governed by. Now this phenomenon, a society directed toward a goal which it pursues as a society and therefore *organized* with a view to that goal, is what was called by the founders of political science by a Greek word, *politeia*, a word which is used for example by Plato as the title of his most famous work, the *Republic*. The literal title is *Politeia*. For reasons which I have explained in my book, I translate the word by "regime,"[ii] with regime meant in that broad sense in which it means the whole society as determined by its regime. Now of such regimes there is a variety; and therefore the theme of political science would be the regime, the variety of regimes. This terminology is not used anymore—the fact is very well known—and it is perhaps a sign of a lack of clarity that we do not have such a term today. When you look at what the social scientists are doing, and especially those who are not limited to technicalities—and technicality can never of course determine the character of a science, because technicalities always need a justification, a broader point of view. Now if you take those who deal with substantive matters today—say, in this building[iii]—all social studies are today related to something which we can call democracy and its problems, and that refers not merely to democratic institutions in the narrow sense of the term but also to the character of democratic society, which is not necessarily defined in legal terms. And not only that: when people discuss education, the problem of democracy comes in all the time. There is even, I understand, the concept of a democratic personality, so that even psychology comes under this view. Furthermore, when we study democracy and its problems and really want to understand it, we have to consider the alternatives to democracy—today, especially communism and fascism. Now this kind of whole social orders with a spirit of their own is what the classics meant by regime, and that is the unifying principle, the unifying concept which is guiding all their specific reflections.

[ii] *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), 136 ff.

[iii] The Social Science Research building at the University of Chicago.

It is inevitable to raise another question, if we take here the example of democracy as that which is nearest to us: Is democracy good or is it bad? Or if the question does not allow of a simple answer: Is it good under these or those conditions and not under others? I am not trying to persuade you of something, for I will later on discuss the difficulties which arise here, but from the point of view of a citizen, of a political man, this question of whether democracy is good or bad, or good under certain conditions and so on, is obviously the decisive question. Without this question, and even without an answer to it, all other investigations in the social sciences remain somehow blind and dumb. Think of a man who knows everything about socialized medicine except whether it is good or bad. What does he know about socialized medicine? So if a man knows everything about democracy except whether it is good or bad, or in what respects it is good and in what respects it is bad, he knows nothing about it. Therefore the question becomes inevitable as a question: What *is* the *best* regime? And that is, as you know, the question which Plato and Aristotle especially, and Cicero and many others raised. So the study of social phenomena, first of all in the light of the notion of regime and ultimately in the light of the question of the best regime—that was the original meaning of political science or of political philosophy. That distinction[iv] did not exist until a hundred years ago or so.

I must add another point. Or rather, I would like to make intelligible this concept of political science by starting in a somewhat different way. The term political science is very old. It occurs quite a few times in Plato, for example, but it did not mean originally what it means today. It did not mean originally a body of knowledge transmitted in classrooms by teachers to students, but it meant the art or the skill of handling affairs of the city. There are various kinds of such skills, and the highest was thought to be that of the statesman, namely, the man who can manage well the affairs of the *whole* city and not only sectional parts, and who can do that well by deed and speech. Speech is in a way even more necessary than deed, because every reasonable action is preceded by deliberation, and it is impossible to deliberate in common without speaking. But it was assumed that there is an even higher skill than that of the statesman, and that was thought to be the skill of the legislator, as they call[ed] it. In modern language, one could perhaps say the "founder," a notion easily intelligible in this country: the founding fathers. That is more than statesman, at least according to the politically popular notion. Lincoln, a great statesman, deferred and could defer to the founding fathers; the founding fathers could not defer to any other man. They could defer only to what? To principles, or to something of this kind. In other words, in this country, which is the only "founded" country in the Western world, at least the only great founded country, this notion is still easily intelligible. So the highest political skill from this point of view is the legislative skill, but not that which congressmen now need—that is too limited—but a man who is able to set up a whole order.

Now the legislative skill can partly be acquired . . . by learning, by studying, because the question is inevitable: What is the right order of society, what is the best order? Or what is the best order under these and these limiting circumstances? Now who will do that? The teaching of that which the legislator himself must learn transcends the legislative skill as such. There is, in other words, a higher skill which is the skill of a teacher of legislators, a notion again which did not completely die out, a notion which you find in Rousseau and in Bentham, even; maybe even in some later writers. That is what political philosophy originally meant: that which can and must be taught to legislators.

[iv] That is, between political science and political philosophy.

There is a politically very important distinction implied here which I would like to mention immediately. The legislator is bound by specific circumstances; say, someone who wanted to set up a state in Pennsylvania in the seventeenth century is confronted by entirely different circumstances or conditions than someone who wanted to set up a city in Sicily in the fifth century. So a legislator's function is necessarily limited by circumstances. This limitation cannot exist for the teacher of legislators because the idea[6] [is] that all action, we can say, is a compromise between what we would wish and what circumstances permit. But it is impossible to make an intelligent compromise if you do not know first what you wish; and therefore this question has precedence. So the original notion of a best regime implies that the best regime is not everywhere possible, precisely because if it is so good it is extremely unlikely that it will be frequently possible. Its actualization will be possible only under the most favorable circumstances, which as such are very rare. The actualization of the best regime depends on *chance*, on whether you have or have not favorable circumstances which as such are not under your control.

This much must suffice now about the primary meaning of political philosophy. When I say "primary," I do not mean obsolete, because this meaning is not obsolete, as is shown by the fact that we can understand it immediately. If you take an obsolete biological theory, for example, that means something which you cannot immediately understand. You have to go into some technical studies or into some entirely different scientific notions to understand that. If someone would tell you something about the [. . .] that is in a way as difficult to understand as a modern chemical theory, but this notion of political philosophy is immediately intelligible if we reflect on the way we take our bearings in political life and how we understand things in political life. One could say that a work like Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* is perhaps the last great book which reflects this primary meaning of political philosophy. It reflects it in the first place in the comprehensiveness of his political analysis. There is no aspect of democracy which is neglected. Secondly, the question of whether democracy is good or bad is the crucial question for Tocqueville. That he answers the question in a qualified manner does not mean at all that he does not answer it, and certainly not that he doesn't raise it. Still, one thing is true, of course: political philosophy in this sense was uncontested in the past by all those who were concerned, philosophically or scientifically, with political things. There were philosophers who had no interest in politics—we can disregard them here—but those who were interested in political things viewed them in the light of this question, whereas in more recent times this understanding of political philosophy or political science has become contested. To that extent, it is true to say that this primary meaning of political philosophy is the classical meaning, the premodern meaning; and other meanings, to which we will turn now, are modern meanings.

I will explain that briefly. Now the decisive event regarding the emergence of a new concept of political philosophy was Machiavelli. For Machiavelli, the subject was still the regime, as you see immediately at the beginning of his *Prince*, where he speaks of principalities and republics, or from similar passages in his works. We can even say that for Machiavelli the question was still what the *best* regime is. And he answers that question: an improved Roman republic would be the best regime. But there is this difference, this crucial difference: Machiavelli defines what the best regime is no longer in the way in which the earlier thinkers had done. For the earlier thinkers, it was understood that the goals by which we define the best regime must be the highest

compatible with human nature. These highest goals they called by a word which is now almost shocking: virtue. We shall have to speak of what virtue originally meant on a proper occasion. Machiavelli rejected that. He deliberately lowered the goals, and he sets as the goals what you may call the ordinary political goals, those goals which are actually pursued by all societies, however crude: freedom, power, glory. Machiavelli does not subject these goals to any criticism, as Plato and Aristotle would have done. Machiavelli simply assumes that if he criticizes these goals he will no longer speak [of] politically relevant things. Societies as societies, he assumes, are simply not concerned with virtue, and therefore it is politically irrelevant to speak of it. We may say also that Machiavelli is more concerned with the necessities which have to be considered by every political action rather than with the goals, the ends, the hierarchy of goods. We may say that Machiavelli narrows the theme of political philosophy or political science for the sake of practicality. The older comprehensive notion of political science was—and this was his objection—not practical. It turned men away from those goals which are actually pursued by society to some lofty goals which had no immediate bearing on politics. He lowered the goals so that he speaks of the language of political man. The influence of Machiavelli was of course enormous, but we may say—and that is certainly true of the Anglo-Saxon countries—that his influence was great only by virtue of some fundamental change in his teaching. To put it bluntly, Machiavelli was too shocking to be accepted by many people. And one could even say there was something fundamentally unpolitical in that shocking character because, as another man said, a wise pupil of Machiavelli's: In all countries people want decency and morality.[v] That is as important a fact as the power drive, and therefore, if someone disregards decency in the way in which Machiavelli does, that is at least as remote from the facts of political life as the flights of fancy in Plato's *Republic*.

Now what is that modification of Machiavelli? It is that kind of political philosophy or political theory which emerges in the seventeenth century and predominated in the western world until the French Revolution. It is important for us to consider that kind of political philosophy more carefully, because the present-day rejection of political theory is based in most cases only on some knowledge of this second kind of theory. Now what is it? It is the kind of doctrine represented especially by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, whose guiding concept is the notion of the rights of man, to use a term which was coined at the end of that process but the substance of which was present from the beginning. These thinkers start their political reflection in an entirely novel way, from what they called a state of nature, a state antedating society. Now this has a very crucial practical bearing and is not just to be dismissed simply as a historical error, [i.e.], that there never was a state of nature. The state of nature means that the primary fact is the individual. Society is nothing but something which the individuals create for their presocial purposes. It is

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[v] Strauss may refer here to Montesquieu. See *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. Anne M. Cohler, Basia C. Miller, and Harold S. Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Consider: "Author's Forward": "I have had new ideas; new words have to be found or new meanings given to old ones. Those who have not understood this have made me say absurdities that would be outrageous in every country in the world, because in every country in the world morality is desired" (xli). Or 4. 2: "Men, born to live together, are also born to please each other; and he who does not observe the proprieties offends all those with whom he lives and discredits himself so much that he becomes unable to do any good thing" (32). Or 25. 2: "Men, rascals when taken one by one, are very honest as a whole; they love morality; and if I were not considering such a serious subject, I would say that this is remarkably clear in the theaters; one is sure to please people by the feelings that morality professes, and one is sure to offend them by those that it disapproves" (481).

from this point of view only that people said, and some still say, that the problem of political philosophy is the state and the individual. That is inherited from this kind of political philosophy. You couldn't say that of Plato and Aristotle. The problem of aristocracy or democracy is—well, of course it has something to do [with this]; it overlaps with these questions, but that's not the horizon in which they viewed things because they take for granted that man is always a social being. Or if people sometimes say "the problem of political obligation," that is also a way of looking at the political problem from the point of view of the individual: Why should I, as an individual, obey the law . . .

The connection with Machiavelli, to say a word about that, is this. The doctrine of the rights of man, or of natural rights, was a modification of an older form of doctrine, the natural law doctrine of the middle ages and of classical antiquity—a subject on which I have also to touch later, so I will limit myself only to the most necessary parts. In that older notion of natural law, the guiding concept was that of the duties of man. The rights of man were hardly spoken of, and if they were, only in a subordinate fashion. That is simple: You cannot fulfill your duties if you do not have certain rights, but the rights are derivative from the duties. In this modern notion, when it is most clearly expressed, just the opposite is true: the rights are the primary things; the duties are undertaken in order to safeguard the primary rights. Now what has this to do with Machiavelli? Well, that seemed to be much more "realistic" than the older notion. The rights of men and their objects are goals, or connected with goals which all men actually pursue. Every man wants to preserve his life. Every man wants to be happy as he understands happiness. That is something real, something effective. But what about virtue? Are people so much concerned with virtue? A sober observation seems to show that people really are not very much concerned with virtue; especially if there is a serious conflict between virtue and other things, they prefer the other things. So from this point of view, fundamentally a Machiavellian orientation, it seemed to be much more reasonable, much more practical, to start from the goals actually pursued by all men, or at least by most men most of the time, than by goals which are rarely pursued and certainly not pursued by those people who are most active politically.

So we can therefore describe this whole type of political philosophy in contradistinction to the older one: that they deliberately lowered the standards of social life, and that is of human life in general, in order thus to guarantee a higher probability of actualization. In other words, a state constructed according to Locke's civil government—you know, where right of property and of acquisition of property is the crucial part—is much easier to get than a Platonic republic, to take the extreme opposite. The same applies even to Rousseau. Or in other words, there is in the older notion the actualization of a good order depending decisively on chance: Will you get these favorable circumstances, or not? This is a fortunate coincidence over which man has no control. The realm of chance is now considerably narrowed because we appeal to something which is generally very effective, and what is mostly needed is to enlighten people. All people want to preserve their lives, their property, and want the honor of their women protected and that sort of thing, but they usually don't know how to get it. They must get the right kind of institutions. The political philosopher is the man who designs the right kind of institutions, and it is only a matter of enlightenment. It may last a long time—very nasty reactionaries, men connected with vested interests, kings, and priests may prevent such enlightenment, and will—but that's all there is to it. Once you overcome them, then the whole edifice of superstition and tyranny, the alternative, must break down. So the whole spirit of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, as far as we can

speak of it (and in a loose way, we may) really finds its perfect expression in this type of political philosophy.[vi] I think I'll indicate this graphically. I indicate that there are three different meanings of political philosophy.

Politea:
1. [classical political philosophy: Plato and Aristotle]
2.
(a) [early moderns: Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau]
(b) [modern reaction to 2a: Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Marx]
3.
(a) [positivism]; (b) [historicism]

The first was a type which I call classical, and of which I have spoken. The second I call modern political philosophy, and that is the sort of thing which emerges in the time of Machiavelli and all the great modern political thinkers. But here we must make a subtle distinction: under [2](a) we put Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, and to a certain extent Rousseau, because with Rousseau some new change started. This is the new and important change *within* modern political philosophy connected with Rousseau especially and the German philosophers Kant, Hegel, and also Marx, the "son" of Hegel. Now what was it? These men, Rousseau and the German thinkers, were radically dissatisfied with that lowering of the standards. To quote just a word of Rousseau: "The ancient political thinkers speak all the time of virtue, ours speak of nothing but commerce and finance."[vii] Similar thoughts occur in all these men. So there is a return to virtue; that is doubtless true. But we have also to say that this return to virtue implied a novel interpretation of virtue. The fact that the word "virtue" has lost its former splendor is, I think, ultimately true . . . In other words, when men like Hobbes and Locke speak in the ordinary way of virtue, they only narrow it down; virtue meant much less than it did in Plato and Aristotle, but it is still virtue. But the change of which I am speaking now is really linked to a fundamental change in moral orientation which expresses itself eventually in a feeling of embarrassment regarding virtue. What is the term which takes the place of virtue? I believe that we can answer that question: *freedom*. And today, as you know, freedom not only in the sense of spiritual liberty, but freedom in the sense of human dignity is a highly respectable term. And I believe that there would be no objection in my department or in any other department in this building to the use of the word "freedom," whereas the term "virtue" might conceivably bring a frown if used. What this change from virtue to freedom means is a very long question, and I can only mention the fact here.

In a sense, what I would call this second wave of modern thought, namely, Rousseau and the German idealists, constituted a return to the classics. And that is, by the way, easily proven historically, because in various ways they all referred to Plato and/or Aristotle against Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Locke. But there is a fundamental difference nevertheless between

[vi] The transcriber notes: "The following paragraph is only an approximation of what was said. A diagram was made at the board, as follows." We have added the content in square brackets to summarize each part of the chart according precisely to Strauss's ensuing explanation.
[vii] Rousseau, *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences (First Discourse)*, trans. R. & J. Masters (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), 51: "Ancient politicians incessantly talked about morals and virtue, those of our time talk only of business and money."

German idealism, including Rousseau, and the thought of classical antiquity, and that expresses itself in one thing which didn't exist in earlier thought, and that is philosophy of history. Since Rousseau, we may say—footnotes I must omit in these introductory lectures—since this time political philosophy is inseparable from philosophy of history. How does this come [to be]? What does it mean? Political philosophy still establishes the right political order, or we might even say the best political order. That hasn't changed. But why philosophy of history? What does philosophy of history achieve?

Philosophy of history shows the necessity of the best order becoming actual. Take the caricature of [Hegel in Marx][viii] [7]—you see it very clearly, but it is also there with slight modification in Kant and Hegel, even in Rousseau. Now this concern with the guarantee of the actualization is the crucial link between German idealism and Machiavelli. The German idealists did not believe that they would have to lower the goals in order to achieve a desirable political order but that the actualization of the right order would be guaranteed by something else which we may call history. But if we look at the historical process which is supposed to bring about the right order, we recognize Machiavelli. Well, you know how the right order is brought about according to Karl Marx. That, every child knows: class struggle, no holds barred. Exactly as Machiavelli says. The same is true in Hegel, from whom Marx took over this idea. The same is even true of Kant. The moral principles on which Kant insisted perhaps more strongly than any other moral philosopher are not the ones which will bring about that perpetual peace; rather, the blind passions of men and the consequences of them, e.g., wars, will simply become too costly. That was Kant's argument. No conversion or moral change is needed. I turn now to number 3, and that is the form of political philosophy or political science which exists today and which was already prepared for in the second half of the nineteenth century. We may say that this can best be understood as a disintegration of 2(b) in my scheme. I will try to explain that.[ix]

Now men like Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Marx assumed this, and that is in a way the main result of their philosophies of history: man has now become the master of his fate. Or, which is only a slight modification, man is *about* to become the master of his fate. That is the difference between Hegel and Marx. Hegel says that he has already become the master, and Marx says we anticipate it in the future. What does it mean to become the master of fate? He knows *now* what the right order is and how it can be established and preserved, and the coming of the right order is now necessary. In other words, it would have been impossible for man in earlier times to know that. This has had a tremendous success in general Western thought, the idea that he could know. For example, when you contrast [it] the thought of Plato and Aristotle, they took it for granted, perhaps erroneously, that what they thought had been thought millennia ago by people of whom no relics remain . . . But in the nineteenth century, the notion emerged that certain thoughts that were absolutely impossible to earlier men have now become possible. And more important, the *culminating* knowledge, namely, the knowledge of the right order and of how it can be actualized—and at the same time the insight into its imminent coming, or maybe its having come—this mastery of fate is a product of fate or of the historical process. In earlier times,men could not have known these things. But still, let us look for a moment at earlier men. Did they know that they did not know? Far from it. They always believed very firmly that they did know.

[viii] In the transcript: "[caricature of Hegel in Marx?]"
[ix] The tape was changed at this point.

Why was this so? Because man was always limited by his fate. He could not know better, limited by fate, by his historical situation.

The *disintegration* of which I speak starts with the reassertion of some common sense, namely, that such a moment in which man is the master of his fate does not exist. We may also call that the absolute moment, the moment in which man has a full insight which he couldn't have had before: This doesn't exist. In the jargon, the historical process is unfinished and is unfinishable. Now what does that mean? It means that we are in the same bad position in which the medieval people and these other savages were. We necessarily believe[8] [that we] know, but cannot possibly know. Or to apply it to politics in particular: man cannot possibly know *the* right social order, but he necessarily believes during each time that he knows it, and that belief is wrong.

Now the grave consequences of this fundamental change were obscured for some time by the belief in progress. Of course we do not know the final truth, but our opinions are evidently superior to earlier opinions. We may say that what medieval men thought or what the savages thought has been refuted. It is clear [that] we know better than that. Our opinions are not refuted—but not *yet* refuted. Not yet. But a moment arose in which this became doubtful, whether it is really true that the earlier opinions have been refuted; or more generally speaking, whether our situation, whether our time, is really superior, unqualifiedly superior to earlier times. This is the state of malaise in which we find ourselves today. In most cases it is not malaise but an unbelievable self-complacency. But in the case of the more thoughtful people, I believe it is malaise and it expresses itself as follows: All answers to the question of justice are historically relative, culture-bound. More than that, all exact formulations on the question of justice are historically relative, and finally even the questions themselves. In other words, I believe that it is safe to say that the Chinese,[9] the Hebrew prophets, the Greek thinkers, and the Aztecs thought about justice; I suppose that there are some words for it in their different languages. But then these men would say that the words don't mean the same thing in the different languages. For instance, the Greek word which we translate as "justice" has really a broader meaning, and so some people translate it by the word "righteousness." The Hebrew, Old Testament word for justice also has a broader meaning. So if the terms used differ from culture to culture, how can you even speak of an identity of the question? What would be identical would be an empty shell even regarding the question, to say nothing of the answer. We cannot transcend the horizon of our culture, or our times. And the very idea of political philosophy as all these men in 1 and 2(a) and [2](b)[x] presupposed of course that men could do that. In the most comprehensive version, which as such is absurd, but still very common, all human thought is historic—always-—and not only regarding political and social matters.

Now this kind of thinking I characterize by a term which is common in Europe, though not so common here, historicism . . . But if I see the situation correctly, that is not the predominant attitude in this country, especially in the social science division. What we find there is something which is called positivism; to be a bit more specific, social science positivism. Now what does that mean? I think that you are familiar with that because it is part of the indoctrination, but I must still remind you of it. What the positivist would say is this: Men can liberate themselves from the particular value systems or worldviews of their societies, as is shown by the fact that there is a universal language. That universal language is of course the language of science.

[x] Referring to the diagram Strauss made on the board earlier in the session.

Science is intrinsically superior to all other forms in which man can take his bearings in the world. Science means the consistent and radical use of reason. Men always use their reason, but if we do that consistently and radically we necessarily go over from common sense to science. For example, in ordinary life we always use language, terms; but ordinarily the terms we use are ill-defined. In the first place . . . the goal of science is to start from clearly defined terms and so on. Yet this science by virtue of which man can transcend the limits of his culture—as it is said, in scientific matters Western man and Chinese [people] can understand one another completely, while if it were a question of other matters, people feel absolutely differently. Yet natural science has essential limitations: science can study only facts and relations of facts, correlations, but it is unable to solve value problems. Science can describe values, can investigate the relation of values to the other social phenomena, but it cannot make value judgments. It can make judgments *about* values, but not value judgments. The question of right and wrong is absolutely beyond the scope of science. In the most extreme form, positivism asserts that the questions like that of natural right are meaningless questions, meaning by that questions which cannot be answered by the means of modern natural science especially.

Now from this positivistic point of view, political theory still is admitted, but in an extremely restricted way. Either it is meant as a tool for studying political facts, in other words, like a kind of methodology of the social sciences. As such, political theory has the function, among other things, to justify the distinction between facts and values, because that is clearly the union card which you have to acquire when you enter social science, namely, to accept the distinction between facts and values. And that is not being done properly by the specialists. It must be done by the one who takes the view of the whole, the theorist. Or in other cases, political theory means something like economic theory, meaning [that] just as we have in economics economic theory and study of economic institutions, we can have political theory and a theory of political science. Or maybe theoretical physics, like the relation of theoretical physics to experimental physics.

Now let me summarize this. You, as students of political science, are supposed to know something of political theory. But there is a very great variety of opinion as to what constitutes political theory. There are survivals or restorations of the premodern view; the most influential is of course neo-Thomism. There are survivals of various stages of modern political philosophy from Machiavelli on to Marx. And we also find the rejection of political philosophy in both the modern and the premodern sense of the term. There political theory remains, and that is what I should have added when I spoke of historicism: political theory means nothing but the clarification of the ideas of our society or the clarification of our heritage. That is very common now. Or political theory means, in the analogy to economic theory, the art of constructing models which can then serve as a guide in conducting empirical research. There is then a very great disagreement regarding political theory, I believe greater than would be the disagreement regarding the study of international relations or public law.

Now in spite of this fundamental disagreement, there is a broad agreement as to one point—and since we want to be very peaceful, I wish to emphasize more the point of agreement than of disagreement—and that is, I think almost all teachers of political theory in this country would admit that we have to study the *history* of political philosophy. This is surprising, because as far as I know, economic theorists do not say that, to say nothing of theoretical physicists, because you don’t have to be a student of the history of economic thought to be a very competent

economic theorist. I know some of them who know very little of what was written in economic theory prior to 1920, and yet they are perfectly competent. I don't think that in political theory that would be admitted somehow. But why is that so? Why is the reference to history so important? The answers to this question are as various as the positions which I have mentioned before. Let us look at them for a moment. The most common, not to say vulgar answer is that which says: Well, what are the political philosophies? They are of course not true, but they are important. They are a kind of [10][ideology]. All societies, we are told, have ideologies, and there is one special brand of them which we call political philosophy. They must be studied as an important social phenomenon. Now that can be defended, to begin with, as almost anything can be defended, but there is the following difficulty. I suppose that if we are to study these ideologies as ideologies we are to do it as honest men, as respectable scholars, which means carefully and conscientiously. Can this be done if we regard them as ideologies? There is certainly a remarkable disproportion between the understanding of Locke's doctrine as an ideology and what Locke himself thought. Locke believed that he taught the truth. Now the positivist cannot take this claim seriously, because he knows that since Locke makes many statements about value questions and there cannot be truth there, Locke must have been wrong. He knows this in advance, before having opened Locke's book. I would say that it is humanly impossible[11] [to] study the history of political philosophy seriously from this point of view. A very superficial treatment of political philosophy is inevitable from this point of view. Does this constitute a refutation of positivism? Far from it, but it means only one thing: that only to the extent to which you as a student of political philosophy are capable of doubting[12] positivism can you understand these books. In other words, you must regard it as possible, say, in studying Locke, that Locke might have taught the truth. If you do not develop in yourself this capacity of doubting your preconceived notions, even if they are right, you cannot understand. And I would say that a reasonable positivist should be glad for this opportunity of checking on the truth of his preconceived notions.

But this is by no means the most interesting argument which is given. I would like to refer you to another one in a book which is otherwise the only good textbook of this kind which I know. It is by Michael Foster, *Masters of Political Thought*, volume 1.[xi] I read to you a few passages so that we can dispose of this very soon.[xii] I think that Foster's views are slightly more respectable, more reasonable than the one which says that theories are merely ideologies, etc. We obviously want to understand our civilization—that makes sense—and to understand our civilization means of course to understand its distinctive characteristics. How can we do that if we do not know other civilizations? Therefore we study, say, Plato and Aristotle, but also Chinese thought in order to see Western civilization's specific character. Secondly, and that is more incisive, I believe, our principles—which of course are not true principles, which are just *our* principles—our principles are a product of the past. We cannot understand our principles if we do not know our past. If I am not mistaken, that is today the opinion which is most widespread in the West, not only in this country. There is an element of truth in this assertion. But we must, I think, restate it.

Now political philosophy, as it was always understood until 2(b) inclusively, was meant to be the attempt to replace opinions about the political fundamentals by knowledge regarding them. We

[xi] *Masters of Political Thought*, vol. 1, ed. Michael B. Foster (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1941).
[xii] The transcriber notes: "The pages cited are all between pages 2-15. Quotations are not given here, but we begin again with the discussion of Foster's argument."

all have opinions about justice, about the state and whatnot. But we can't leave it at that; we have to know something about that. That was the meaning of political philosophy. Well, but how can we replace our opinions by knowledge without first knowing what we opine? We must formulate our opinions in order to subject them to criticism. That is a philosophic necessity. But if we try to do that, we see in many cases, perhaps in all cases, that we can't clarify them without so-called historical studies. For example, things like sovereignty: that has a very settled meaning, and you learn that perhaps in certain courses, but that is very inadequately clarified. You really have to go back to the classics of the theory of sovereignty, men like Hobbes and Bodin,[xiii] in order to understand what sovereignty means. And the same applies to other concepts. It is impossible to understand a term like "state" and its meaning without making certain historical studies. So it is of the essence of political philosophy to require a previous clarification of our opinions prior to their criticism. This clarification almost insensibly changes into historical studies, namely, the genesis of our opinions. Our opinions are on the whole inherited opinions, and that means that what was originally thought with explicitness and clarity has become abbreviated and obscured. And to recover its full original meaning, prior to the question whether this is a sound or unsound concept—for example, take sovereignty. Before you can discuss the soundness or unsoundness of this concept you must really know what the term means, and that you cannot adequately do on the basis of knowledge available now. I would say offhand that this seems to be the most reasonable argument justifying the necessity of historical studies, and all worthwhile historical studies probably have this character.

But have we now made a mistake here in this seemingly conclusive reason? If you look at Aristotle's *Politics*, for example, you see that Aristotle is trying to clarify concepts all the time, and certainly in most important cases he clarifies them perfectly. The question is still whether what he says about these things is right or wrong, but there is no question that he reaches his clarification without engaging in any historical studies. And as a matter of fact, until a relatively short time ago no one doubted that; say, a hundred years ago, but not before, no one thought that historical studies of this kind were of any philosophical importance. How come? Were they just naive and blind, and did they not know anything about the historical character of all human thought as we know it? Or . . . must we make a distinction? Maybe the concepts which we have and which we use are of a different character from the political concepts used in former times. Perhaps it is so that not all concepts need such a clarification; for example, when we think of such things as a horse. And Homer speaks of a horse already; he meant the same thing about the horse, and if there were certain aspects of the horse which are not quite so important to us as they were to him, we can easily see it by reading him. They are still intelligible to us, and quite a few people would see a horse in the same way. But there are other concepts which do not have this character. Let us call, for convenience's sake, these other concepts derivative concepts, and let us assume for the time being that there are certain concepts which have this derivative character. And it is possible that the typically modern concepts *all* have such a derivative character, so that they cannot be clarified except by historical studies.

Now does this make sense? Throughout the modern era, the most influential thinkers believed in progress. Now what does progress mean? It means that certain primary questions can be solved, can be settled once and for all. You have thus a sure foundation, and then you build on that foundation. Do you have to worry about the beginnings? No, the foundations are sufficiently

[xiii] Jean Bodin (1530-1596). See, e.g., *The six books of a common-weale* (1606).

established by the fact that the structure which you erect on it *stands*, and works. But still one may wonder whether that is theoretically sufficient, whether it is not necessary to return from time to time to the hidden foundations. And since there are people who deny progress, special efforts are needed, and [it is] these efforts [that] we mean by historical studies. In other words, for modern man the foundations of his thought are not contemporary with him. Certain decisions were made, let us say, in the seventeenth century by men like Galileo, Descartes, etc. But who studies Galileo and Descartes? They are now gradually becoming important, as you can see by the college curriculum here, but until a short time ago no one did that except some specialists and antiquarians. But look at the situation in the Middle Ages. In the Middle Ages a political theorist would of course study Aristotle's *Politics*. In other words, the foundation of his thought would be contemporary . . . contemporary not in the sense that Aristotle was born in the Middle Ages, but in that his own education, his own training is a training in the foundations as originally laid, whereas we are not trained in these foundations as originally laid. We need a special effort. The feeling for the necessity of it is, I believe, increasing from year to year, and therefore we see that even the study of the history of the exact sciences is regarded by more and more of the exact scientists as something very important. It is much more obviously so in political theory. At any rate, we can say this without any danger of error: that the very concern with the history of political philosophy is somehow connected with the facts of *modern* life. In premodern life there was no such concern as an important concern. In a marginal way it always existed, but that is not important.

I think I will leave it at that for now. But if you wish, I shall say a few more words about this subject in order to provide a kind of framework. Without my simple distinction of the three different understandings of political philosophy, I could not very well guide you in this immense mass of doctrines. Do you have any questions?

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[1] Deleted "while."
[2] Deleted "of."
[3] Moved "changing."
[4] Deleted "to raise."
[5] Deleted "therefore."
[6] Deleted "being."
[7] Deleted "that."
[8] Deleted "to."
[9] Deleted "and."
[10] Deleted "ideologies."
[11] Deleted "that you can."
[12] Deleted "of."

Session 2: No date
The History of Political Philosophy

Leo Strauss: [In progress] —because some of you may have had some difficulty in following in this very crowded quarter.[i] Now what I said was this: that natural right, the subject of this course, is the theme of political philosophy, the problem with which it is concerned. If political philosophy is reflection on the fundamentals with which political science and in fact all social science is concerned, natural right must be called the fundamental problem of the social sciences altogether. Now this is not generally accepted, as you know, and I was therefore forced to discuss the various meanings of political philosophy and as distinguished.[ii]

Now the first meaning of political philosophy is that which is familiar to all of you, I believe, from Plato and Aristotle, in which the theme of political philosophy is[1] most obviously the variety of political orders or of regimes—of social orders we can also say, but with the understanding that the guiding question is a question of the best regime. Now in modern times this comprehensive understanding of political philosophy was considerably modified, and in the first place we have this kind of political philosophy of which the most famous documents are [the writings of] Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, in which political philosophy takes on the form of natural public law, as it was called in the seventeenth century. The meaning [2][of] the chief question is what may the sovereign do and what ought he to do as a matter of right. The question of politics proper, namely, the wise exercise of rights, was relegated to the background. That form of political philosophy which was still prevalent about a generation ago, called theory of the state, is a decayed form of that natural public law. The crucial point being that the question of regimes is not the fundamental question of this modern type of doctrine. There was a reaction to this modern kind of political doctrine connected partly with Rousseau and with German idealism especially; and this part, which I indicated by 2(b), is characterized by the fact that here political theory, or political philosophy, is accompanied by philosophy of history, something which is absent from both 1 and 2(a).

Now in our times, and this was prepared in the nineteenth century already, we find notions of political theory, let us say, which amount to a denial of the possibility of political philosophy. And of this we find two forms shading into each other naturally, but still distinguishable: one I called positivism, and the other I called historicism. According to this view—3(a), positivism in my scheme—political philosophy is just a form of ideology like any other ideologies. It has certainly no cognitive value. There is such a thing as political theory, but that means either methodology or else something like economic theory in economics. Historicism[iii] has greater respect for political philosophy, if one may say so, at least in words. According to the historicist's view, political philosophy is [the] expression or clarification of the principles of a

[i] Twenty-eight students were registered for the course; others were "sitting in" (including Mr. Goldwin, who is mentioned by name).
[ii] The transcriber notes: "referring to scheme showing divisions of political philosophy." See session 1 for Strauss's chart of the three different meanings of political philosophy and the ensuing explanation.
[iii] In the scheme, positivism is 3(b).

given society. For example, an elaboration of the American ideals: that would be the maximum goal of political philosophy according to the historicist's view, which today is of course very popular.

Now since these two latter views are today more powerful than any alternative, I would like to say a word about the decisive difference between the two things,[3] positivism and historicism. The characteristic theme of positivism is that the study of facts is independent of specific principles of preference or values. The distinction between facts and values is the characteristic feature of positivism. Historicism proper would deny such an independence. It would say in one way or the other that it is impossible to understand any fact without some fundamental premise which includes value. This is expressed by one of my colleagues, Mr. Morgenthau,[iv] who says that you must always have an image of man, and that image of man means of course value judgment. Now as Mr. Romoser[v] points out in the discussion at the end, the distinction which I suggested is not exhaustive, and that is quite true. The meanings of political philosophy which are omitted are today not very powerful, and so I thought I might disregard them in a preliminary consideration. I mention two important alternatives—important in the past, especially in classical antiquity.[4] To me that was, [first], conventionalism, which is of some importance because conventionalism is precisely the assertion that all right or all justice is conventional, all morality is conventional. There is no nonarbitrary or natural element in morality and in justice. And [second], skepticism, which even goes beyond conventionalism by saying that no knowledge of any kind is possible[5] [about them]. Now[6] [these] view[s] of conventionalism and skepticism are dead today, which does not mean that they are refuted, but they are lingering on in positivism and historicism. But they are not of an immediate concern to us right at the beginning. Mr. Romoser also raises the question of the status of Georges Sorel[7].[vi] Now I don't recall that Sorel ever said anything about what political philosophy is or ought to be, but if one would judge by what he does, one could say that his implicit understanding of political philosophy would be the same as that of Marx,[vii] his position presenting itself as an up-to-date version of Marx's philosophy of history.

Now in spite of this anarchy of opinion as to what constitutes political philosophy, there is at least one thing today generally admitted in regard to our subject by I think all students of political theory, namely, that it is necessary to study the history of political philosophy. I don't believe that even Lasswell[viii] would deny that. Now the generally-accepted reason for this view that the study of the history of political philosophy is necessary is this: we have to understand the principles of our own society, and these principles are the products of history. This reason is

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[iv] Hans Morgenthau (1904-1980), German-born scholar of international relations and one of the founders of the twentieth-century realist school. Professor at the University of Chicago from 1943-71; author of *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1948).

[v] George Romoser, a student in the course.

[vi] Georges Sorel (1847-1922), French political thinker.

[vii] Strauss might be referring to Sorel's advocacy of violent direct action by the working class to maintain confrontation and class struggle. Sorel believed the working class would save the world from the decadence and timidity of the bourgeoisie. See *Reflections on Violence*, ed. J. Jennings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[viii] Harold D. Lasswell (1902-1978), American political scientist and sociologist; considered a leading exponent and practitioner of social science methodologies based on modern sciences and psychology or psychiatry.

based on the tacit rejection of the possibility of political philosophy in any substantive sense of the term. This reason is based on the premise, in other words, that it is impossible for us to go beyond the principles of our society or[8] transcend them. But the same conclusion, namely, that it is necessary to study the history of political philosophy, is reached precisely if we accept the fundamental idea of political philosophy, namely, this: political philosophy means an attempt to replace opinions regarding the political fundamentals by knowledge regarding them. It is therefore necessary to state or formulate our opinions and even to clarify them, but if we try to do that, we find out invariably that our opinions are not our opinions, that they are inherited and therefore confused or obscured in the process of transmission. Now clarification of opinions is in itself a philosophic pursuit, but if we embark upon that we notice soon that the philosophic clarification of our opinion[s] changes insensibly into historical reflections.

I have indicated that this reason is solid as far as it goes. It certainly applies to us, but it is perhaps not universally valid. If we look back to the past, we see, for example, [that] Aristotle speaks very well in clarifying the political opinions he examines without embarking on any history of those opinions. But as I said, it is sufficient[9] [for] us if we need history of political philosophy, regardless of whether many other generations did. I would like to restate this reason, because I believe it is of some importance. Now if we think and look around us, and think, we notice very soon that we are bewildered, and primarily by great practical problems. Today, take the problem of loyalty in all its aspects. To be bewildered means, however, or almost means to know that we are ignorant. From this we can proceed as follows: all political action and all political thought has to do with either improvement of things which bear improvement, or else with preservation of things which are tolerably good. Now in other words, in all our thinking or action we imply some notion of better or worse, and that in its term presupposes some notion of good or bad—good or bad now in a very broad sense, not necessarily limited to morally good or morally bad. We have then some vague understanding of good or bad as regarding political matters. If that is so, it becomes necessary to replace that vague understanding by a clear understanding.

To fully clarify the understanding of what we mean by good or bad in political matters is precisely what Plato and Aristotle meant by the best regime. This way, in other words, from ordinary everyday political reflections and actions to the quest for the best regime, is today as evident as it always was. That is one part of our confusion. The other part is the doubt of the feasibility of the Platonic-Aristotelian project, the doubt of the feasibility of answering the question of the best regime. Now this doubt is today of course much stronger in academic circles than the primary evidence of the reasonableness of the Platonic question. But this doubt has also this character: that whereas the evidence, simple evidence leading from improvement or preservation to the best regime can be made clear to every twelve-year-old child, the doubt of its feasibility has to begin with the character of a habit. We have been brought up in the doubt of its feasibility. Now the habitual character of the doubt means that the full reason underlying the doubt cannot be recovered without historical reflection. The doubt is the residue, the sediment of many reflections made in the past by many great men.

Now if we look at this, if we would make such an analysis we would see that this doubting of the Platonic-Aristotelian scheme started decisively with Machiavelli. And [there were] some further steps which I don’t have to mention now. Now what does it mean that this simple natural

reflection leading from improvement[10] [or preservation] to the question of the best regime, while being natural and therefore susceptible of being reproduced at any time by any man, is somehow located in the premodern world in spite of its natural character, whereas the doubt of this possibility, developed in its full and theoretical form, is at home in the modern world? So at the threshold of our reflection we meet the issue which was once called the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns; and this quarrel, as is indicated by the very term itself, is a historical problem. This quarrel, I think, will again and again prove to be the most urgent issue for everyone trying to think about fundamental problems of politics; and it is in the spirit of this quarrel, as it were, that I am trying to approach the matter.

Now let us make one additional remark at this point. I speak of a quarrel, and by this I do not imply that the quarrel has not been resolved. And it seems to me that by taking this plan and by suggesting to you to take this plan, I am proposing something which is much less dogmatic than what is proposed especially by positivism, because positivism, the most powerful thing in the American social science, is of course based on the premise that the quarrel has been resolved a long time ago. In other words, positivism takes something for granted which we should not take for granted. Positivism boasts very much of its undogmatic character. I believe that by questioning, by at least trying to question the premise of positivism, we are less dogmatic than positivism is.

Now if it is then necessary for us to study the thought of the past knowing that it is thought of the past—because if it is clear that if I study Plato's *Republic* and the book is directly addressed to me or to you, to anyone else regardless of time and place, then that is not historic; it is just as if I would read today MacIver's *Web of Government*.[ix] I mean to say there is a difference between the two books in various ways, but the attitude of the mere reader would not be different. But if I[11] read Plato's *Republic* with this thought in mind, that it is a book of the past, then the historical reflection enters; and that, I believe, is necessary, because without the historical reflection we don't have[12] sufficient clarity about the obstacles obstructing our understanding. We have greater difficulty in understanding Plato's *Republic* than men of earlier generations had. It is with a view to these difficulties that we speak of past and therefore of "historical."

Now if it is then necessary for us to study the thought of the past as thought of the past, the question arises how we should study. I would like to make a few comments on this question. The goal of every study of this type, the primary goal, must be to understand these doctrines exactly as they were understood by their originators. That is in a way trivial, but it is very important because it is one of the maxims which is usually disregarded in practice. How can we say, for example, whether Plato's teaching is true or false, or partly true and partly false, without having understood what Plato says? The experience you have in reading any book or in doing a review of a book is sufficient for verifying these points: you can't judge the value of the books or the doctrine without knowing first what the doctrines covered will be.

Still there is this difficulty. To understand does not, cannot possibly mean merely to take cognizance of the fact that, say, Hobbes said this and this. To understand means somehow to reproduce the author's thought in one's own thought: to rethink it, to rethink it as Hobbes meant it. But therefore to understand means to do some thinking on one's own, and one cannot do that

[ix] Robert MacIver, *The Web of Government* (New York, Macmillan, 1947).

without examining the thought one is studying. I think that it is obvious that, for example, if you follow a certain chain of reasoning, you do not understand it by merely following the sentences without reproducing the reasoning; and to reproduce the reasoning means to see whether the reasoning is true or false. It is not obvious? In other words, the factual judgment, "A has this chain of reasoning," and the value judgment, "This chain of reasoning is sound or unsound," are inseparable. You may make a distinction for some reason, I don't know which, but in fact the same intellectual process which allows you to understand the fact is a value judgment.[x] In some cases you may not be able to make value judgments because you don't understand it fully, but then you can't make a factual judgment either. Of course this kind of gross error of reasoning is very rare in great writers and one could say for this reason not very interesting. The really interesting problem concerns the premises. Now in most cases, that is at least our first impression, the author makes certain assumptions. At the beginning of Locke's *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, for example, you read about the equality of men. And the question is: Why? Locke doesn't answer. So in all we are confronted sooner or later with certain fundamental premises which the author regarded as self-evident. Maybe they are not self-evident to us; we take them as problematic, and taking these premises as problematic we see that the conclusions follow. That doubtless can be done. We postpone as it were the answer to the status of the premise. As long as we do that we can say we are engaged in a historical work of interpretation which as such can be distinguished from the philosophic work of criticism, and within certain limits that is absolutely necessary.

Now in other words, I suggested a distinction which I believe was once very common—it is very evident to common sense as well—between interpretation and criticism. It is slightly different, I believe, from the distinction between fact and value, to which I have referred and to which I shall have to refer again, because when we interpret, say, Aristotle, the whole enterprise is based on a value judgment, namely, that it is worthwhile to study Aristotle, a value judgment which is of course based on reasoning. I mean, if you just study Aristotle the same way you study the *Chicago Tribune*, that would be an unreasonable and irrational act. We have very good reasons for that, and these reasons include the fact[xi] that Aristotle has a great mind. And if this is not a value judgment, I don't know what it is. And it means furthermore that to have a great mind is something admirable, which is still more of a value judgment. So in the first place, the selection of an author or doctrine for our study is a value judgment; and furthermore, every intelligent interpretation is of course, even if it does not culminate in criticism or in ignorance, which is perhaps inevitable. We study always with a prospect of a finer value judgment. Is this doctrine true or untrue? Without that, our whole study would be absolutely meaningless. We can say that the goal to understand a great thinker exactly as he understood himself has of course nothing whatever to do with any intention of empathy; that is, sharing the emotional experiences of this man. We are as uninterested in them as they themselves were. We are only interested in their doctrines, in that final product of their personal experiences for which they have taken public responsibility. Psychoanalysis has nothing to do with interpretation.

Now this goal is very difficult to achieve—in fact, impossible to achieve, because we must not conceal from ourselves the fact that we, or at least most of us, are not great minds, and we deal

[x] In the transcript, "allows you to understanding the fact is a value judgment" is in parentheses, perhaps the transcriber's guess as to what Strauss said.
[xi] In the transcript: "(the fact)"

with great minds and we have to make a very great effort to reproduce that. That is not easy, but still theoretically it is of course possible, and this theoretical possibility is the only thing with which I am concerned now. It is possible that one finite mind can understand the equally finite thought of another finite mind. In other words, even if it should be impossible to resolve the fundamental problems themselves, it is [not] intrinsically impossible to understand the solution, the problematical solution to the fundamental problem by another human being, however great.

Now if interpretation means to understand the thought of other men, living or dead, and not necessarily criticism in the comprehensive and final sense of the term, we must also distinguish interpretation from something with which it is sometimes mistaken and which we purposely call mere repetition or mere reproduction. Sometimes you read such books, not only doctor's dissertations but books written by much older men, which really just are brief summaries of what a great man developed perhaps after twenty years' work, like Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws*. And that of course[13] is not an interpretation; that is something for which we don't have to use any value judgment. But why is interpretation necessary? Why is mere repetition not enough? Well, in the first place, there are always what we can call simple obscurities, by which I mean obvious obscurities, such as when we don't understand what he means. Take an extreme case: Spinoza's *Ethics* begins with a set of definitions. Well, no one who took this book and [. . .] ever understood what that means. You need some guidance, and especially today you need some guidance to understand that. And things of this kind occur time and again. Sometimes authors use technical terms or other terms which are not intelligible to us. You need some help. That does not have any problems. The more important part is this: whenever we study another author seriously, concerned with the question which was most important to him, we are naturally more interested in the premises of his thought than in his conclusion; therefore the emphasis is inevitably different from the emphasis at least explicit in his work. And so take, for example, a book like Locke's [*Second Treatise*]. For a serious understanding of Locke it would be necessary to devote much more work in clarifying the basic premise that all men are by nature free and equal than certain conclusions, however important from a practical point of view, such as the difference between executive and legislative and so on, because the latter is fairly easy to understand. That you can really understand[14] if you read it twice. And you can make irrelevant comments about the conclusion, how his conclusion has a tremendous effect on later thought, or how it was connected with certain institutional devices developed by the British, and so on. That is irrelevant. You don't need that to understand what Locke means. But the premises, that's the problem.

And thirdly, I want to mention another point that is connected with the first I mentioned. The starting point of an exposition necessarily varies from period to period. Even if there should be only one truth, men start in each situation from a different point toward the truth. In the clear Platonic image, men live in a cave, and to know the truth means to leave the cave: [to] ascend from the cave toward light of the sun. I only interpret Plato; I don't correct him when I say there are many caves. There must be an infinite variety of caves. All have their purpose and problems, but there is an infinite variety of caves, and therefore the starting point of all reflections differs from situation to situation. Now every writer addressing [. . .] thinks very naturally primarily of the cave out of which *he* [. . .] So, say, Plato assumed that the cave is more or less a world, a *Weltanschauung*, as the Germans say. Hobbes had a different notion of that. We have, as it were, to replace in thought their cave by our cave. We have to rewrite Hobbes's *Leviathan* in that

manner that it would be intelligible to us starting from this *Weltanschauung*. No mention of the conflict of democracy and fascism and communism is found in Hobbes, but the doctrine is meant to bear on that phenomenon as well. That is also part of the interpretation.

Since, as I told you at the beginning of the last meeting, I would like to use this course for a dual purpose—(a) to present the issue of natural right, and (b) to give you a kind of specimen of how one could give the "isms" course so necessary in college training—I would like to say a few words on the problem of how one could teach political philosophy. I mean, leaving open the question whether philosophy can be taught at, all but granting[15] for the moment that in one way or another that is possible—otherwise we would pronounce a death penalty on ourselves—I raise the question. Now I think it is quite obvious that the only proper way of teaching political philosophy is that of seminars, of seminars devoted to a single text which is worthwhile—and the shorter the text, so that one has more time, the better. But that is not a very feasible thing for those who have to teach in colleges, especially, but even at the graduate level seminars are not quite sufficient.

I believe one of the most common courses is a survey course in the history of political philosophy. And that is the most difficult course to give because—well, imagine that someone is maybe a young man of twenty-five who is supposed to run at a terrific pace where the greatest mind could walk only with very great circumspection: this is an impossible thing to do, and yet it has to be done. I believe it could be done if we had a better kind of textbook. It seems to me it would be possible to write a textbook of this kind. Take roughly [the] fifteen greatest political thinkers, the most important thinkers—an agreement as to that could be reached among competent people, as to who those fifteen men are—and write on each a short essay of fifteen pages answering such simple questions as: What is the main theme? That is to say, which main question does he address to political [. . .] Second, how does he go about answering it? And third, what were his chief results? In each case we need only restate in an intelligent resume what the author himself consciously thought. That could be done. It is not being done today because most writers of this kind are more interested in informing the readers of how they, the writers, responded to the teaching than [in informing them] of what the man himself thought. The older history of Dunning, *History of Political Thought*,[xii] is I think from this point of view by far superior to Sabine[xiii] and later history, because Dunning, I believe, tries to give you some notion of what, say, Montesquieu taught. There is a term used on the European continent, as Mr. [. . .] knows, for this kind of thing, but not practical anymore, and it is history of dogma, the history of the great teachers. If such a book existed, I believe a young college teacher could, by making it his rule to read every year or two these great works, and then in seven years [to] have read all these fifteen men of whom he knows to begin with only from this reliable source. There is only one thing at the present time which is roughly useful as a substitute for that, and that is Foster's *Masters of Political Thought*,[xiv] which so far deals only with classical antiquity, but the selections which Foster made, as distinguished from his introduction, are very sound and are

[xii] William A. Dunning, *A History of Political Theories, Ancient and Medieval* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1902); *A History of Political Theories from Luther to Montesquieu* (1905); *A History of Political Theories from Rousseau to Spencer* (1920).
[xiii] George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (New York: H. Holt & Company, 1937).
[xiv] Michael B. Foster, *Masters of Political Thought, volume 1: Plato to Machiavelli* (London: G. G. Harrap, 1942).

indeed some help for an understanding of Plato and Aristotle. As for the "isms" course, I will postpone that, as I will do that in a sketchy way myself.

I also think another kind of course which could be given and which would be better from the point of view of training of both lecturers and students, and that would be specific courses about small texts; for instance, the Declaration of Independence. A real interpretation of the text of the Declaration, and especially of the Preamble, naturally, which is more important from the point of view of philosophy or theory than the detailed complaints about the tyrannical behavior of George [III]. And it is easy for everyone to see, and in addition it is universally known that the Declaration of Independence is based in some points literally on Locke's *Second Treatise of Civil Government*. So it would be a very short book, too. One could easily connect Locke's *Second Treatise* with that. And furthermore, Locke himself refers all the time to Richard Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, book 1 especially, and I think that would be a perfectly feasible course on the college level: the Declaration of Independence, Locke, and Hooker. If someone has read these three pieces, and especially Locke's *Second Treatise* and Hooker, and [read them] carefully, he has understood by this very fact what I call the quarrel between the ancients and moderns. And that is quite a lot. I believe it is also possible to read the *Federalist Papers* together with two or three chapters referred to in the *Papers* from Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*, especially book 2, chapter 6, "The Analysis of the British Constitution," which in its turn is modelled on the sixth book of Polybius's history, "The Description of the Roman Constitution." This could very well be done in one semester. And then again you would see the fundamental issue of the moderns and ancients in a concrete and solid way. So by this I conclude my general introduction to [the] course. And before I go on, I would like to know if there are any questions you would like to raise.

Student: [. . .]

LS: But can you have an opinion as a thoughtful being, an opinion about good or bad, without trying to get knowledge about that? I know that quite a few people leave it at that, but we call them obstinate, unreasonable, prejudiced, and so on. We must try at least try to get knowledge where we have only opinions.[16] There are certain dimensions where we can leave it at an opinion—for example, tea or coffee—but we all know they are unimportant things. True, even in important matters we might have to be satisfied with something short of knowledge, assuming prior to investigation it is possible that[17] [in] the end, our preference, say, for democracy versus communism is no different from our preference for tea or coffee. As you know, that is today [a] very common notion, but that would need some argument. If it were possible to have knowledge, it would by all means be more desirable.

Student: [. . .]

LS: [. . .]

Student: Are you going to tell us which one of the approaches is preferable,[xv] or leave us to decide for ourselves?

[xv] In the transcript: "(is preferable)."

LS: That is, I would say, purely a rhetorical problem, a matter of what one should say or should not say. But what I said before is this: I believe that one cannot understand that issue[18] of the ancients and the moderns without raising the question: Which is true? They can't both be truth because they contradict each other, and therefore the question arises: Which is true? And I will try to present to you the evidence pro and con. Whether I draw any conclusions explicitly or leave you to do that is purely a rhetorical question. But lest you think I shirk, I tell you that I think that the ancients . . . But I may be wrong. But what is impossible, I believe, is not to clarify this matter in one's own mind, that one has or must have an answer to this question. My objection to positivism is in one way very simple: They do not know the alternative. Theoretically one could imagine a positivist who has a full understanding, or a practical or adequate understanding, of Plato and Aristotle and other men and rejects them *en pleine connaissance de cause*.[xvi] Practically, that doesn't exist. I don't at all think it is inaccurate to say this. I believe that positivism by its whole structure disqualifies itself, prevents itself from taking seriously any alternative. But that is another matter which I will take up somewhat later. Yes, surely one has to raise this question. There is no way out, and everyone does [so]. Our positivistic friends do the same thing in their way, only they usually don't take seriously the alternative.

Mr. Goldwin:[xvii] In some books I have read recently, the argument goes that suggestions for change or so-called improvements of society really are only suggestions for improvements of the welfare of certain groups in that society, and that in fact there is no one who is sincerely devoted to improving the whole—and in fact there probably isn't any welfare of the whole. So that according to their argument suggestions for change, for so-called improvement, which they would put in quotation marks, do not imply any notion of good or bad.

LS: All right, I have heard this view. But what would follow from that if it were true?

Mr. Goldwin: That people know in general what's good for themselves, or at least that they are striving for that, but that . . .

LS: Now let us introduce for one moment one term which I think is intelligible for our purpose. Let us take an honest man, a person who would refuse to speak of a measure being just if it is only good for his clique. Now if there is no justice, it simply means that only collective [selfishness] exists, and not of the group as a whole but of subgroups. Now what is the conclusion from this problem?

Mr. Goldwin: These folks would say there is no such honest man.

LS: All right, but I assume there is. I mean, I assume that they are just mistaken. If I ask other people to do something for the common good and I know that it is only for my own good or the good of my wife, then I am a dishonest man. It is our duty to find out about this. Now if it is so, if that is merely dogmatic denial of honesty, what would follow for the honest man? Maybe this

[xvi] In full knowledge of the facts.

[xvii] In the transcript, Mr. Goldwin is not identified as the speaker. The attribution to him of this question is made on the basis of another student's subsequent reference to "the position just expressed by Mr. Goldwin." It appears that Mr. Goldwin continues his exchange with Strauss.

honest man—I don't claim to be one myself, but I say that the mere fact that I can see the possibility shows to me that there *may* be such men, but what is possible is that honest men are extremely rare and so we can disregard them as far as political matters [go]. And so these people might still be right, for all practical purposes, but what would follow from that? That one beastliness is replaced by another beastliness. I mean, once you have the rule of the bourgeoisie and you have the rule of the proletariat, then you have the rule of the hereditary nobility, and all are really self-seeking people who don't give a damn for mankind. If you do not find somewhere a point where someday you can find some sense—or you can do that; you can have an interest in tigers, in lions, in elephants, but that is not what social science means [. . .] Positivists would say: What we call common good is always the good of a part, a class or any other group, which is insincerely presented as a common good in order to put to sleep the resistance of those who are hurt by that. That is part of the conventionalist heritage in politics. We have to take that up.

Student: I was just going to suggest that one test of the position just expressed by Mr. Goldwin would be whether these people themselves are forced to assume a common good in the background or as one of their premises. And I think it can also be shown that their whole viewpoint is structured upon the belief in the common good at the same time they deny the possibility of its existence. For instance, one book refers to the rules of the game, constitutionalism, which is, I think, a form of recognition of the common good within which all of the selfish actions take place—without this framework . . .

LS: Yes. In other words, everyone has an interest in the rules of the game being observed, regardless of what the outcome is. Everyone is better off generally speaking than without the rules being observed. Now then I don't think that all positivists would put it that way. Today I think it is principally a heritage from Marxism, only denying one implication of Marxism, namely, that there is one class and only one class which, by thinking of itself alone, cannot help but act for the best interests of mankind. But if you deny that, if you say that the proletariat is just as unrelated to the good of mankind as any other class, then what are you to do? But this problem is, as I say, very old, and of course it must be analyzed. I don't claim to have disposed of it, but I only say to begin with we have to reflect on it, and that we cannot assume that something which today is more generally accepted is for this reason true, which of course it is not. We know that things once definitely established are today ridiculed as errors.

Student: Did you make the distinction between political philosophy and political theory by saying that political philosophy is the study of what is the good regime, and political theory is the study of the institutional means of achieving that?

LS: I did not make this distinction and I wouldn't make any distinction. If I referred to such [a] distinction last time, the only reason was that I was trying to reproduce accepted opinion. Now if I look around, or read, or speak to people, I see that the term "political philosophy" has today a somewhat different connotation from the term "political theory." The typical social scientist positivist would not want to have anything to do with political philosophy except to pay it some lip service, but political theory is respectable from his point of view. But talking now seriously, and not really historically or as a reporter, I would say I don't see why these should be distinguished. To quote Aristotle, the knowledge of the means belongs to the same science as knowledge of the end: reflection on the use of tables and chairs and reflection on how to make

tables and chairs can be distinguished but actually are inseparable.[xviii] How can you say something really relevant about which institutions are good for this or that purpose without knowing their purpose? And the purpose is not understood, of course, by a mere one sentence assertion that my purpose, say, is freedom. That won't help you any, because it is much too ill-defined. So you have to spell out what you mean by freedom much more fully, and this determines which means you would consider or not consider and so on.

Student: Does not political philosophy have to do with value judgment, and political theory with the facts?

LS: In other words, the distinction you suggest is based on the legitimacy of the distinction between fact and value. If this latter distinction is not tenable, then why should we make the former? For example, to mention the two most obvious examples, Aristotle's *Politics* and Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws*. They deal obviously with both. This is a two-way street: the means throw light on the end. Some ends that we seek from the beginning prove to be impossible if we take up the question of what[19] [the means are], and therefore the ends must be revised and vice versa. That is, which means we investigate depend on which ends we seek.

Student: You said that all political action is concerned with improvement or the preservation of accepted goods. Is that a premise of yours?

LS: Well, take the Korean conference.[xix] What's the purpose? To get some *détente* in the Cold War, the assumption being that this *détente* would be better than permitting the Cold War to reach that point where it is almost hot.

Student: [. . .]

LS: Both. Regardless of how conservative or stationary a society may be, there is always some improvement going on: people build roads . . .

Student: But is this political action?

LS: Building roads may very well be political action, because you must have the taxes to pay for the road and the agreement of the people who have to give up some land, and so on. Whether there is any difference as to the emphasis on improvement or preservation is really an irrelevant argument, because improvement means to get something better than you have, and preservation means to keep something which you regard as tolerably good. Whether you put the emphasis on improvement or preservation does not alter the fact that all political action has to do with better or worse. Preservation is directed against something worse: decay. Incidentally, I use of course the word "improvement" rather than "progress," because improvement does not have the theoretical difficulties which are connected with the word progress.

Student: I am still not clear on this point. For practical purposes the means and ends are inextricably connected, but cannot the political writer make a distinction between them?

[xviii] *Physics* 2. 2, 194a28-194b9.

[xix] The 1954 Geneva Conference on Vietnam and Korea.

LS: All right, let us say a man writes a book on the purpose of democratic government. If he does not show that this end is feasible, what is the purpose of the book? And must he not go into many institutional questions, into many factual questions, that is, go into the question of the means—How this end can be achieved?—to make his recommendation of democracy stick. You can make all kinds of separations. This is shown most clearly by telephone directories: there you have a complete separation of one aspect of human beings, namely, their telephone numbers, from all other aspects, but the question of course is whether it is a wise abstraction. Let me say it differently. All science implies of course abstraction from some other things. Abstractions are inevitable. But there are two kinds of abstraction: abstraction from the essential, and abstraction from the unessential. Now it seems to me that if one abstracts from the means or from the ends, we would be guilty of the same fundamental error. So we abstract from the essential.[xx] But the question you raise is not really [so much] the question of ends and means in this sense as it is the question of facts and values. It is not necessary to make this distinction and to understand the purpose of the social sciences accordingly. If that [distinction between facts and values] is necessary, it might necessitate a distinction between two kinds of political theory along the lines suggested, namely, one kind of political theory which does not evaluate[xxi] —the evaluating kind of political theory as unscientific and intellectually not respectable. If we can't know about the validity of values, then we shouldn't talk about them, about the validity of values. But we have doubtless to consider this question of facts and values, and I would like to turn to that now if there is no other question.

Student: [. . .]

LS: That is a very intelligible question because—that is, you know of the character in a French comedy who learned late in life that he was speaking prose, [learned] the difference between prose and poetry; and then he said: I didn't know that I had been speaking prose all my life.[xxii] Now in this sense one can say that very much of present-day American social science is historicist without knowing it. But the reflection on that is simply more developed in Europe, so you find clearer statements of this position in European literature than in American literature. The most useful book in the English language of which I know is Collingwood—I think R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*.[xxiii] But the sociology of knowledge is a pipeline to historicism too, and this has had an effect in this country. Another one is of course Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, which via Ruth Benedict has affected American thought.[xxiv] But the positivistic position is much more developed in this country theoretically than the historicist.

[xx] In the transcript: "(So we abstract from the essential)."
[xxi] The tape was changed at this point.
[xxii] Molière's character Monsieur Jourdain in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*: "By my faith! For more than forty years I have been speaking prose without knowing anything about it, and I am much obliged to you for having taught me that" (*The Middle-Class Gentleman*, trans. Philip Dwight Jones (Gloucester: Dodo Press, 2007), Act 2, scene 4.
[xxiii] R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946).
[xxiv] Ruth Benedict (1887-1948), American anthropologist, author of *Patterns of Culture* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934).

I am not particularly interested whether I assign the right label to everything individual, but the main point is that the meaning of the position is understood. But anticipating later developments, I would say right away this, that I think the decisive difference between positivism and historicism is the attitude toward natural science.[20] Every positivist's position is based on the assumption that modern natural science, and its corollaries like social science, is the highest form of thinking orientation man has ever had, so that modern natural science is unquestionably, absolutely superior in dignity to any other science or myth, or what have you; whereas the historicist would say modern natural science is as much historically relative as any other form of thinking orientation in the world. Spengler is a good example. According to the common view, modern mathematics is of course definitely superior to ancient mathematics. Quite a few problems which the ancients couldn't solve have been solved by modern mathematics, and whole dimensions of mathematics [which] were wholly unknown to earlier men were discovered by modern mathematics, whereas Spengler says: No, modern mathematics is just an entirely different approach to this kind of thing, and Greek mathematics is as perfect in itself and cannot be legitimately criticized from the modern point of view. That I think is the crucial difference, and there is a practically decisive difference. As long as the prestige of modern natural science is not questioned, positivism is still a matter of course. And in the moment[21] [modern natural science] is questioned, that takes on in the popular mind at least the form of historicism. It is obvious that this assertion regarding science leads to certain difficulties. Is this sufficient enough?

Now I have to devote some time today and next time to a critique of 3(a) and 3(b),[xxv] because the only way in which I can show you that natural right is a problem and not just a myth of the past is this, that I show you that the views which prevail today are not so obviously satisfactory that we have a right to reject alternatives which were more powerful and more accepted in the past. And I turn first to some remarks about positivism. Now the real theory of positivism is not, for example, causal theory or whatever one might call it; it is a very secondary part. The real theory of positivism consists in those reflections which are meant to justify the distinction between facts and values. That is the basic part of the positivistic theory, at least as far as the social sciences are concerned. Now I would like to give you some specimens of the discussion. The most recent one of which I have heard is a book by Lewis White Beck, *Philosophic Inquiry*:[22] *An Introduction to Philosophy.*[xxvi] There is a whole chapter with the title "Intelligence in the Choice of Values" that leads to this problem. Now Beck's position is more moderate than that of some other writers on the subject, but fundamentally he presents the usual view. I read to you:

"The facts of science are reached by abstraction from the variegated world of experience. Long ago, men learned that in order to understand, explain, and control things, they had to center their attention on those aspects of things about which they could agree with one another. Judgments of the beauty, pleasantness, goodness or desirability of things vary from individual to individual; hence these judgments were banished from the organization of the knowledge of 'things as they are.'"[xxvii]

[xxv] See session 1, n. vi.

[xxvi] Lewis White Beck, *Philosophic Inquiry: An Introduction to Philosophy* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1952).

[xxvii] *Philosophic Inquiry*, 185-86.

Now Beck's is a typical statement. It reminds us of what happened in the seventeenth century. At that time, men made a distinction between two kinds of qualities:[23] one kind of quality was banished and the other was regarded as belonging to science. I[24] [suppose] you remember that distinction or know it: primary and secondary qualities. Now what has the distinction between primary and secondary qualities to do with the distinction alluded to here by Beck?

Student: [. . .]

LS: Yes, but what are they? Give some examples of secondary qualities.

Student: Cold, hot, red, green.

LS: And so on. So the sensible qualities—the sensible qualities; and as a kind of subdivision of the sensible qualities, the value qualities, if one may say so: good, pleasant, and so on. Now obviously, as stated here, that is not very reasonable, because the difference of judgment between individuals regarding hot and cold is at least as great, as you can convince yourself very easily, as between good and bad. For example, a toothless old hag with a vicious eye is not regarded [as] beautiful by anyone, whereas [about] whether it is hot or cold in this room, there is a great variety of opinion. Judgments of value, as he calls them, vary. But what about judgment of fact? Obviously there is a great variety of opinion regarding fact. What that implies is that men of competence and of very special training, [in] judging about a certain problem of fact are not likely to disagree. I read to you another passage:

"Primitive men . . . did not learn, and we have not learned, how to get real agreement whether a specific painting made with these pigments is beautiful, or whether a war fought according to good scientific strategy is morally just. We have established sciences of chemistry and optics and strategy. We have no rigorous science of aesthetics and ethics."[xxviii]

I ask you: Do you know of the existence of a rigorous science of strategy? Do you remember the famous controversy between the two wars about the Maginot Line strategists and the mobile warfare strategists? That was not a rigorous science. So in other words, the distinction is not as simple as it is here presented. "Competent men," he says, "can almost always agree about factual judgments."[xxix] We note the word "competent" here, and we have to wonder whether there are no criteria of competence regarding morals and aesthetic matters. Maybe there aren't. But we know from experience that some people judge differently from others because they are indescribably crude! Now this crudeness would not prevent them [from] taking medicine,[xxx] but it would certainly prevent them from being good judges in such matters. So we must be a little more careful. "Judgments of value" are radically different.

"They express an appreciation either *pro or con*. Such judgments are [for example—LS]: 'You ought not to give sodium cyanide [poison—LS] to your guests' . . . 'The population of [the city of—LS] New York is too large for the people in it to live a good life.' Such judgments as these

[xxviii] *Philosophic Inquiry*, 186.
[xxix] *Philosophic Inquiry*, 187.
[xxx] In the transcript: "(taking medicine?)"

may be agreed to by many individuals, but when there is disagreement, it is difficult to resolve the conflict and show which of the two discrepant judgments is correct."[xxxi]

It is interesting that he says it is only *difficult*, and not impossible, by which he gives the whole show away. But is it true that there is such a disagreement regarding facts? I give you some other examples from a previous chapter:

"In the social sciences there are few established collateral hypotheses that can be appealed to as solid ground for testing doubtful hypotheses. Consider, for instance, a social scientist who wishes to test the hypothesis, 'Capitalism is a cause of imperialism.' He must have a collateral hypothesis about the economic conditions of political changes in general, before he can discuss the specific economic condition of a specific political phenomenon.

"As illustrations, consider the diverse theories which have been formulated to account for the French Revolution or World War I—some find them to be illustrations of the laws of economic determinism, and those at the other extreme find that they illustrate the social consequences of the thoughts of philosophers like Rousseau or Nietzsche." [xxxii]

Now here you have *factual* questions, but factual questions a little bit broader than the question of how many streetwalkers there are in the city of Chicago, which can be found out, I suppose, by experts just counting. But if it is a question of the causes of the First World War, a factual question, you have the same difficulties encountered in resolving a value question.[xxxiii] In other words,[25] [the difference] would seem to be[26] this: complex and less complex questions. That is not a good basis [on which] to make a distinction between various [. . .] sciences. The more significant factual questions are as difficult to resolve as many value questions. In other words, the question of the old hag to which I referred is infinitely easier to resolve than the question of the causes of the French Revolution, e.g., for people who know what they are talking about.

Now he speaks of the lack of agreement regarding values. That is the stock topic introduced whenever this question comes up. The implication sometimes is that this lack of agreement regarding values is the source of all conflict. This complicates the question, but we should take it into consideration. Is it really true that conflicts turn chiefly around differences of values? No, and on the basis of ordinary experience. There is a saying of King Francis the First of France, when he spoke about his relations with Charles V, German emperor and Spanish king: "What my brother Charles wills, I will too,"[xxxiv] namely, Milan. In other words, they have exactly the same value judgment and the identity of the value judgment is the cause of the conflict. If Charles V

[xxxi] *Philosophic Inquiry*, 187.

[xxxii] *Philosophic Inquiry*, 175; 177-78. In the transcript, the passage is abridged.

[xxxiii] In the transcript: "(encountered in resolving a value question)."

[xxxiv] We have been unable to identify a specific reference for these words of King Francis I. Francis and Charles V played out a long and intense rivalry in various political and military conflicts. Regarding Milan, Francis captured the city from the Swiss in 1515. Francis was defeated and captured by Charles on the Italian battlefield of Pavia in 1525. Milan was contested in the Italian War of 1536-38 following the death of the Milanese ruler Francesco Sforza: perhaps this was the occasion of Francis's remark. Further Italian war between their forces ensued from 1542-46.

had only wanted a certain painting, a different value judgment, there would never have been a conflict.

Now this [relation between agreement on values and conflict] is of some importance for political analysis altogether. If you think today of the way in which people argue about communism and Nazism versus liberal democracy, a very common use of[xxxv] different "values." Is this really so, necessarily so? I once argued with a fellow-traveler some years ago, and I said that there are just certain things we would not do, and they would do them. To which he said, "Wait a moment: you do quite a few things." He meant this: In emergency situations, liberal democracies do certain things which they normally would not do. Now without going further into the question of whether there isn't a difference between emergency situations and normal situations, he fundamentally argued as follows: We assert that for the time being and for the foreseeable future, there is a universal emergency situation. So what is then the issue? Fundamentally this: the character of this emergency situation for the communists is the emergency to end all emergencies. We don't see that; we don't even have to deny it, we only have to say, "We are not sure of it," a factual assertion regarding the character of the present difficulties. The Marxists say they know exactly what it means because they have a so-called philosophy of history, which is a factual assertion. Because the values in which Marx believed, and in which I do not believe, are accepted by many sincere adherents of liberal democracy: that everyone should fully realize himself and should if possible be a painter, a garbage collector, a philosopher, a shoemaker, this idea is accepted by many hundred-percent adherents of liberal democracy. I don't say that this does not raise an interesting question, whether that is really a good life and whatnot, but that is not the issue between the liberal democrats as such and the communists as such.

Even regarding the Nazis, with all their talk about the beauty of war and strength and such—and this is opposed by the view that war can never be a desirable thing—but the Nazis were forced to invest lots of money in what they called racial science. Why? Because they felt that if this was not true, e.g., what they said about the importance of race in general and the Nordic race in particular, they could not do the things they did. This does not mean that a man like Himmler could not do them, but there were other people in Germany and in the world who needed some argument. So that without an appeal of this kind, an appeal to human reason regarding *facts*, is there such a thing as race? Is it true that all culture in the world comes originally from Iceland or from northern Norway? And that sort of thing. In other words, what I'm driving at is this: that by putting all the emphasis on the distinction between facts and values and analyzing political conflicts in the light of this distinction, we are driven practically to stop much too early in our analyses of the various political systems by simply referring directly to a value judgment, something irreducible to anything else, instead of giving a close, detailed analysis of the complete system. But let me return to the argument as presented by Beck.

"We ought not to confuse the value statement, 'Charity ought to be practiced by all men,' with the factual statement, 'Charity is practiced by all men.' [That is obvious—LS] The falsity of the latter statement does not imply the untenability of the former. There is no *logical proof* that there is no absolute value."[xxxvi]

[xxxv] In the transcript: "(a very common use of)."
[xxxvi] *Philosophic Inquiry*, 195.

Now by "absolute value" he means a value that is not justified by reference to something further. A relative value is something like medicine ("I need that medicine for this toothache"), but whether the toothache is something bad that should be fought is [a] question of absolute value. We don't *know* of any absolute value, and therefore the existence of any absolute value cannot be established. It remains uncertain, and therefore we must not presuppose the existence of any absolute value in our scientific inquiries. That is to say, we must base our inquiries on the distinction between values and facts.

Two questions arise. First, is the separation of values and facts feasible for the social sciences? No one would deny that in very special and limited inquiries it might be feasible, but is it feasible as a general practice for the social sciences? And secondly, can we simply abandon the quest for absolute values? Now on the next page he gives a long list of various values. He classifies them: biological values, economic values, affective values, social values, intellectual values, aesthetic values, moral values and religious values.[xxxvii] This is meant to be complete, I take it. Why is not the absolute value the totality of all these values? If value A is valuable and value B is valuable, wouldn't A plus B be still more valuable? And wouldn't only an unreasonable man say: I want only value A and not value B? Beck visualizes that problem and says that that cannot be done, for the following reason: "conflicts may occur between the values of the various classes. Certainly the pursuit of moral values may conflict with the cultivation of the economic . . . the intellectual is often thought to conflict with the religious—"[xxxviii]

What an argument! What follows from the fact that the intellectual is often thought to conflict with the religious? Absolutely nothing, except the demand that we investigate that. In the other cases, he says, they may conflict. Well, let us avoid the conflict, and then we shall always be in agreement with each other. And the same thing applies regarding the antithesis between the aesthetic and the moral: let us not accept any aesthetic things that conflict with the moral, and vice versa. I suppose there are some cases where they do not conflict.

This is the way in which these arguments are usually constructed. Now the conclusion that would have been drawn by everyone, I think, until a hundred years ago, was this. These trivial facts are well known: there is a variety of values, and not all are of equal rank and they must be pursued in accordance with their rank. And the theoretical task would be to find out the optimal scheme, as far as that can be done in a general theory; namely, that proper proportion of the various values that would really satisfy most. And then you would have of course on that basis—i.e., on the basis of an optimal scheme—a number of imperfect schemes. They may be equally imperfect, and you may not be able to say anything more than that they are equally imperfect, in which case you can only toss a coin. This was always known, and there is nothing particularly disturbing about that. You still can distinguish in a responsible manner between imperfect schemes, in case you can't get the perfect scheme, and those which are altogether bad; and after all, this ability to make this distinction is what we need most. In classical terms it is of the greatest importance for us to know good reasons why, for example, a certain type of concentration camp is an abomination, even if we can't decide questions of nonconcentration camps and of a more

[xxxvii] *Philosophic Inquiry*, 196-97.
[xxxviii] *Philosophic Inquiry*, 197.

respectable character. We can know[xxxix] which scheme would be preferable to the other provided the principles are clear.

Beck also says: "some degree of achievement of one or more of the first four types [biological, economic, affective, and social—LS] seems to be a condition of achievement of most of the last four."[xl] Is this not of some importance, to know that without health and without a minimum of other things of this kind we cannot pursue anything that men can reasonably regard as worthwhile? That would be of some importance; that would be a value judgment: "while it is probably true that any value can be intrinsic (as is the case of the roué or the miser)"[xli]—the roué regards certain kinds of sexual satisfaction the most important thing in the world; the miser regards the accumulation of treasure as the most important thing in the world. OK, but are they people to whose judgment we have to bow? Value problems are practical problems, and we have therefore to think of them in practical terms. We are confronted, say, with a distant relative who is a miser: assuming that he is a man who is capable of listening to reason, would one not use some argument, would one not say at least a trivial thing, such as that he can't take it with him? Is the obstinate preference made by any human being, however stupid or narrow, something to which we have to bow? We may have to accept him and his ways because he does not listen to us, but this is no reason for regarding the judgment of a miser as in itself defensible. I must say that I cannot understand that. The case of the miser is a beautiful example of where it is possible to realize for oneself that this is a preposterous proposition: to spend one's entire life accumulating treasure without having any other enjoyment but the knowledge that I own these treasures. That is a very unreasonable life.

[Beck continues]: "the higher human cultures, and not merely our own, have most often professed to regard the last four types as values that make life 'worth living,' while the first four make it possible simply 'to live.'" [xlii] I note that Beck does not put "higher" in quotation marks, which is fatal to his argument. Of course one could say that that is only a printing error or a slip of the typewriter, but then it would still be this: It means something if we distinguish between various kinds of culture, and if there should be an agreement between the higher kinds of cultures, as they call them—that is, cultures which were enabled to develop partly because they were better situated from a climatic point of view—that agreement would carry some weight. We seem to have travelled some way from Beck's[xliii] original statement that from individual to individual there is a complete difference of opinion regarding values. The disagreement cannot be profound if all higher cultures share this important view that the intellectual, aesthetic, moral, and religious values are the only ones that make life worth living.

I must read something to you as an illustration of the [. . .] to which the distinction between facts and values leads. If one knows that one cannot know anything about values—say, a value like a sense of pleasure—except that one knows what it means, and furthermore can find out what consequences to draw if one regards a sense of pleasure as the highest good . . . This leads to the consequence that rational discussion regarding these subjects is simply discouraged, because we

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[xxxix] In the transcript: "(We can know)."
[xl] *Philosophic Inquiry*, 197.
[xli] *Philosophic Inquiry*, 198.
[xlii] *Philosophic Inquiry*, 198.
[xliii] In the transcript, "Beck" is in parentheses.

know in advance that nothing can be known about them. If we know this, why should we bother, except to find out what our values are and state them: stupidly, obstinately, and leave it at that. Now Beck discusses here one problem which is of some interest:

"*Can we validate a value judgment, and if so, how?*—This is the question of the standard. It is the problem of testing the first premise of the syllogism, which is the value judgment that now concerns us. Imagine, then, the situation of the person who is certain that he ought not to go to medical school because, he says, 'I think a person ought to do only what gives him pleasure, and I know that I would not enjoy that.' An adviser, for some reason whose psychological genesis we do not need to know, is not a hedonist and rightly or wrongly thinks that he ought to go to medical school. If the adviser attempts to persuade him, he would probably attempt to show him that he would enjoy medical work and thus appeal to what would seem to be the facts of the case (i.e., attack his second premise); or he might try to show that the value judgment underlying hedonism and this particular application of it is unsound. We are now concerned with the second kind of attempt. Something like the following conversation may ensue:

Q. "You say that you won't study to become a doctor because you wouldn't enjoy it. That means, I take it, that if you thought you would enjoy it, you would agree that you ought to go to medical school?"
A. "Yes. If I thought I'd get pleasure from it, I'd certainly go."
Q. "Does that mean that whatever you could get pleasure from is something that you'd try to do?"
A. "Yes, that's my 'philosophy' [he puts philosophy in single quotes—LS]—always act so as to get the greatest pleasure."
Q. "Well, frankly I believe that you would enjoy the work if you'd just let yourself. But maybe you know better what you would enjoy than I do. Even so, I wonder if you really mean what you say. Isn't there anything that ought to matter to a person except the amount of pleasure he gets?"
A. "No, that's my philosophy [without single quotes now—LS]. You ought to get the most pleasure you can."
Q. "How about this, though. Yesterday I heard you say about the professor of philosophy who gave such a boring lecture, 'I'd like to strangle that guy!' If that would have given you pleasure, why didn't you do it?"
A. "That's easy. I don't want to flunk the course or go to jail. I wouldn't get any pleasure out of *that*, though I would like to throttle him before he gives another such lecture."
Q. "But suppose you were sure you wouldn't have flunked or gone to jail. Oh, I know you can't be sure of things like that, but just for the sake of argument suppose you were. Would it then have been right to strangle him because he gave a boring lecture?"

Up to this point, the questions and answers are perfectly straightforward. But in answer to this last question, we can imagine at least two replies:

A1. "Yes. If I were sure I could get away with it, it would be right to do it."
A2. "Perhaps I ought to say, 'It would be right for me to do what would give me the greatest pleasure provided it doesn't interfere with the rights of others to do the same.'" [But this question can no longer be decided.—LS][xliv]

[xliv] *Philosophic Inquiry*, 220-22.

Now I was really shocked when I read that. I didn't think for one moment that it was really possible to make this a rule, never to accept any unpleasant things because I want pleasure. The[27] simple [old] example used by the hedonists of old, of the bitter medicine which we do take because we want pleasure, this old example didn't occur to Beck. I think that is very characteristic. I'll take up this question from a somewhat different point of view next time.

In one passage Beck refers somewhat indirectly to the oldest conclusion from our situation that was ever drawn. This so-called fact of the disagreement regarding values is of course not a new discovery. It was always known. Nothing known about this matter today was not always known. But what is the conclusion which a reasonable man would draw from that? Now Beck, deviating from some of his colleagues, does not say absolute values are unknowable; he merely says they are unknown. What follows from that? We must not give up. If we don't know, the question is so important that we must devote all our energy to it. That was precisely the old Socratic argument: If we are ignorant about the most important things, and the question of how we should live is the most important thing from any point of view, hedonist or no hedonist, then we know that the most important thing is to find out about them. Only the definite certainty that nothing can be known about them could conceivably induce us to give up. But as Beck says, we don't have such certainty.

The distinction between facts and values is a dogma, a dogma that rules the present-day mind in many quarters as powerfully as the most obscurantist superstition[28] ever ruled the mind in the human past. That it has a certain plausibility within certain very narrow limits I would not deny, but there is no superstition which does not also show a certain rational aspect. If we have to take the proposition as a whole according to which it means that it is possible to have an understanding of society on the basis of the rejection or the elimination of all value judgments, it is a dogma wholly unfounded. That you can count heads and whatnot without so-called value judgments I don't deny, but social science means something more than just counting heads. It means to understand society—or call it social processes, if you want—and this is not possible on the basis of the distinction between facts and values.

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[1] Deleted "the."
[2] Deleted "in."
[3] Deleted "—between."
[4] Deleted "and."
[5] Deleted "from it"
[6] Deleted "this."
[7] Moved "is."
[8] Deleted "will."
[9] Deleted "to."
[10] Deleted "of perfection."
[11] Deleted "read it,."
[12] Deleted "a."
[13] Deleted "that."
[14] Deleted "it."
[15] Deleted "that."
[16] Deleted "that."
[17] Deleted "at."
[18] Deleted "--that issue."

[19] Deleted “we mean”
[20] Deleted “Because.”
[21] Deleted “it.”
[22] Deleted “in.”
[23] Deleted “and.”
[24] Deleted “propose.”
[25] Deleted “what.”
[26] Deleted “is.”
[27] Moved “old.”
[28] Deleted “that.”

Session 3: January 13, 1954
On David Easton and Others

Leo Strauss: That is not ultimately satisfactory, but it would certainly prevent the gravest misconceptions of human things that would otherwise be unavoidable. Now in one sense positivism is very strong today. If a vote[1] [were] taken, say, in the American Political Science Association or in the sociology associations, the overwhelming majority would be in favor of the fact-value distinction. But that is not decisive, because scientific and scholarly or philosophic questions cannot be settled by a majority vote, as I hope is evident to all of you. And therefore we must not be unduly impressed by this numerical relation and also look at the authentic . . . One can say that today, in spite of the appearance of great youthful vigor, positivism is in the decaying stage and on the defensive.

I would like to make some comments on the most recent book which I know on this subject. That is my colleague Mr. Easton's book, *The Political System*, which shows[2] in perfect clarity the fact that positivism is on the defensive.[i] Mr. Easton has very little to say about the distinction between values and facts; he takes it simply for granted, making some changes to which I shall refer later. The bulk of the work, at least that which is not merely reporting and historical, is devoted to the question: What is political? That is an absolutely necessary and important question, but what strikes me is this, that when Easton discusses this question he is not to my mind sufficiently aware of the fact that this discussion in itself is political theory. [3]He seems to regard political theory as rather something towards which he is working his way and[4] [which] he calls "causal" theory, and which is understood in analogy to economic theory or theoretical physics. I think there is a connection between the lack of realization as to the basic theoretical character of the question of what is political and the relative neglect of the value problem. In both cases we must observe an arbitrary limitation of the investigation—arbitrary because it is not based on an analysis and understanding of the subject matter, in this case of political things, but on certain preconceived notions of what scientific method is.

Now let us look at Easton's discussion of what is political. He states the former view of what [the] political is, and where the political is defined as something related to the state, which is still, I think, among old-fashioned people the most common understanding: political is that what is significantly related to the state. Therefore the question naturally would be: What is the state . . . Now Easton rejects this notion for a number of reasons. In the first place, he says, there is a variety of definitions of the state; he says that someone enumerated fifty-nine or so many different definitions. This lack of agreement seems to prove to him lack of clarity and precision of the term. And his conclusion? One should abandon the term altogether. Now let us consider this reasoning, because it is fundamentally of the same character[5] [as] the reasoning of Beck which I discussed last time. Easton does not deny that there are states and that they are political phenomena, so the question "What is a state?" would still be necessary. There is an infinite variety of definitions, or a very large variety. That goes without saying. But the question is: Should we be so impressed by that variety as Easton is? For example, one definition he gives is:

[i] David Easton, *The Political System: An inquiry into the state of political science* (New York: Knopf, 1953). Easton (1917-2014) was member of the political science department at the University of Chicago from 1947 to 1982.

The state is government. Now that is obviously nonsense to say that, as a moment's reflection shows. For example, is Alsace-Lorraine a part of French government? Obviously not; but it is clearly a part of the French state. If two states are at war, are the governments and only the governments at war? Are not the governed as well at war? That is an important definition, "states are governments," just as the opposite definition, to which Easton does not refer but which is given by a French constitutional lawyer, DeVries,[ii] who states that the French state is forty million Frenchmen, which I think is easily shown to be absurd if you only think of France at the end of 1940. The forty million Frenchmen were there as they were before, and what happened to the French state?

So people and professors and scholars and whatnot sometimes say very unreasonable things, and that is all right, but we must not be unduly impressed by that. We must not lose our heads. Another definition to which [6][Easton] refers is Hegel's: "the state is a moral universe," whatever that may mean, and Marx's, where the state is the instrument of exploitation of one class by another. I would raise this question: Is this not an issue, that the state is something incredibly unjust in itself? . . . an instrument of exploitation, or the incarnation of justice—the most perfect incarnation of justice, as Hegel seems to say. Is this not an issue? Must it not be discussed? Can it not be discussed? If we read further on in Easton we see that he does decide that issue, not exactly in favor of Hegel, but certainly against Marx. That is, we need a state, some coercive government under all circumstances, which is of course a denial of the Marxist thesis according to which the state was thought to wither away. So if he himself decides the issue, it would seem to be an issue.

Or take another question. The state is sometimes identified with society. Sometimes the state is understood as one association among many. Well, let us see what Easton himself does on this subject. "We have in the concept of authoritative policy for a society a convenient and rough approximation to a set of orienting concepts for political research."[iii] "Each group has sets of tasks, the scope of which embraces something less than all those conditions demanded for the survival of society as a whole. Only a society casts its net over all these tasks."[iv] And that term, "society as a whole," occurs more frequently in this connection. Now obviously, here the political according to Easton is related to society as a whole, distinguished from any partial group. State—we could [say] if we introduce the term "state" into Easton's definition, the state is a society as a whole, acting on behalf of the whole. But at any rate, the question of whether the state is one association among many or whether it is the all-comprehensive association has to be faced by Easton too, of course, and answered. Finally, he remarks in this connection that there is no potential agreement of the majority of men regarding the definition of state. Well, I can only say that should not bother us for one moment, because[7] we cannot [be] positively concerned with [what] the majority of men, meaning competent or incompetent people, would think of about the subject.[v] At any rate, to state it very simply: the fact that the problem is difficult does not entitle us to disregard the problem. That would seem to be elementary. But in many present-day discussions, and that is of course underlying also to the value problem, the problems of value seem to be more difficult to handle than certain problems of a factual nature which can be taught

[ii] Probably Henry P. DeVries, coauthor, with René David, of *The French Legal System* (1958).
[iii] *Political System*, 129.
[iv] *Political System*, 136.
[v] The transcriber placed a pair of question marks (??) after this sentence.

sometimes by simple counting. That is no reason for giving them up. If the difficult problems[8] are uninteresting and unimportant, [then] by all means we are not in favor of self-torturing, but with the result that they are really the most impossible.[vi]

Now the second point which Easton raises against the conception of the political as the state is this: that the political[9] is broader than the state. We find politics in three states of society.[10] To which I would say in the first place that these three political societies are not excluded by those men who speak of the state. Only people in the societies are regarded by these older thinkers as defective or incomplete. What does Easton say about this subject? "The clarity and precision with which the statuses and roles of legislators and administrators are defined will depend upon the level of the development of a particular society. Societies could be placed on a continuum with regard to the degree of definition of such roles."[vii]

This [is] defined [by Easton] as existing in the latter[viii] states of Western Europe,[11] [and as hardly [12]discernible] as existing in nonliterate [13][societies]. A minimum condition for the existence of any society is the establishment of some mechanism, however correct or incorrect; [14][in] arriving at social decisions, one must make that distinction between the crude and fully developed. Once you make that [distinction], as you are forced to do, you can use perfectly the definition of the state meaning only the completed one—using only, of course, the shades of undeveloped and uncompleted forms of states. But these uncompleted political societies are at best strictly speaking uncompleted states.

But these prepolitical societies are as political as states are. Why? Because we find in them political charters for the control of society. This implies another understanding of political: political meaning power, power over men, which is stated in political works of the last two decades, [and] which we must reject because it is too general. We find power everywhere, even in marriages. Power struggles and therefore power is not a good subject of political in particular. Easton's own suggestion is that we should define political as activity which influences the kind of authoritative polity adopted for society. Authority or authoritative allocation of values of society: by that he understands advantages regarded as good, and also negative values such as the infliction of the death penalty upon an individual. One would be forced to call the infliction of [the] death penalty a negative value. But more important for our problem is to discuss what he means by "authoritative." Authoritative means what people consider[15] [to be that which] they must or ought to obey; that is, to accept a ban or a protective society, as it is called by some citizens in this country, or in Moscow, for that matter. They allocate values, no doubt, and people think they must obey it. The authoritative values. I do not mean to imply that he denies the moral value of authority, as he in a later chapter discusses the moral value of political research. But I would submit that the moral problem of political research is an entirely different question from the moral foundation of authority. This question is open and crucial, for without it we could never make a distinction between civil society and the gang.

[vi] The transcriber placed a pair of question marks ("??") after this sentence.

[vii] *Political System*, 137-38.

[viii] The phrase "latter states" is not in Easton's text. If "latter" is a correct transcription, then "latter states" can be plausibly said to express Easton's notion of stages of development of societies. In the same sentence we have inserted the word "discernible" since it appears in Easton's text in precisely this passage which Strauss is paraphrasing (138).

Finally, the most important part of the argument concerns society. It appears that in some instances society is the whole of society and an independent society. Society is an association living together independent of other societies and collectively undertakes to satisfy all of the minimum requirements of group life. This implies the idea in society of unity. Therefore there must be something which keeps it together. What is it? It must be its end, of which Easton speaks: the minimum requirements of group life, by which he understands peace and independence. [16][The] question of whether that is [a] sufficient end of society is not raised because it is not articulate—the ends are not articulate. If there is another unifying factor, what is it? And he says that[17] custom could be sufficient in simple societies most of the time, but there must be some mechanism [beyond custom] for just in case. This mechanism beyond custom is what he means by government. Government in all society is essential.

I just wonder: Is this concept of the word "political" any broader than the word "state"? And is it not also subject to the same objection, and does it not need to be defined to fit all political societies? Very solemnly he speaks of the broad grouping of people living together. But if you take societies like the Teutonic tribes which conquered the Roman Empire, where citizenship was personal and not territorial, what does "living together" mean here? They live together with other people and really do not belong to a society. Can one say in an absolute monarchy that society satisfies collectively the minimum requirements? You can do that by disregarding how society conceives of itself. You will be forced to do that. No definition of society can equally fit all relevant facts. You have to make a distinction one way or another between the normal and the abnormal, the complete or incomplete. It would seem that definitions of society as an association independent of all others which is subject to some human government—that is fundamentally what the conception, the crude conception of the state means.

Now this particular remark that society satisfies collectively, and so on, which I read to you, and [there are] other passages which are equally revealing. The distinction between group and social groupings consisting of informal . . . nevertheless important character. The existence of social groupings must be distinguished politically from the social group. Every responsible governmental official must take into consideration the response of the social groups throughout the society. Is this universally valid? Is it true that the Soviet government must be responsive to all the requirements of the social groupings? There could not be groupings in that society, the way their society is constructed. It would seem that this whole notion of politics is modeled upon a specific regime, [the] democratic regime.[18] With respect to a point I mentioned before, [19][that] makes impossible the understanding of political phenomena of any significance [by] not taking into consideration the whole context in which they occur. That means the regime. By speaking of political process, they mean the political process in a democracy. But in most cases political process is not in a democracy. But when it is, most political scientists aim at universals, but we cannot leave it at that. In a monarchy it would be different. I remember a remark of Hitler's, that if he did not have the ability of leadership he would not be successful. He was not a demagogue: he did not have to be. It was not a part of the political process. To convince one individual, that was the political process. To speak of the political process without defining in what framework one speaks of it, the regime, is too vague and insignificant.

However questionable this argument by Easton may be, I am glad that he raises the question more clearly than other writers do of what is political. And he admits, in fact, without clarifying it theoretically that this question is the most fundamental one that political scientists can raise, and that it cannot be answered scientifically. His whole thesis shows this. Political theory as Easton understands it is not concerned with questions of this kind but is primarily causal theory, meaning aiming at broad generalizations of political behavior of any government. He admits that this course of theory is still in the distant realms of aspiration; and there is even a passage on page 31 which would seem to show pious hope, reporting it as simply our duty to a friend without showing how it could be achieved. This would seem to force us to raise the question: Causal theory is admittedly not in existence [and there is] no concrete way of showing how we could get it; that of course does not prove its impossibility, but it forces us to raise the question that perhaps there is something fundamentally wrong with the idea of uniformity of political behavior. To come back to the point I originally raised, does not political behavior depend upon the regime? Those things which are neutral, which are not affected by the regime, would be nothing but triviality. In other words, the fact that the demand for the scientific study of politics has been raised now for three centuries [and] nothing has come out of it, it can be interpreted in two ways: three centuries is [a] relatively short time, or the trend has been in [the] wrong direction.

Easton is aware of the difficulty in the following way. In order to find these uniformities, you have to study facts, but what we would study now would be the behavior of specific human beings of mid-twentieth-century America. How are we entitled to generalize from that to say something about man in general on the basis of what we know about human beings, generally qualified in that way? The difference of regimes appears today of the most historical variety, and historical variety creates a tremendous difficulty for all positivists. Easton believes that this is the strongest argument that his opponents have. Of course we cannot conclude from the fact that political doctrines which we have in America [. . .][ix] is a general characteristic of political power. What we have to do to get general uniformity is cross-cultural research—the term is today used—but this is manifestly insufficient. Easton, pages 32 and 34. The change in social environment operating on the nature of man causes people to behave differently under different situations. Accordingly, what was true of human behavior in the past need not be true of behavior today. This means that it is impossible to arrive at enduring generalities about society. This would mean that [the] behavior of one society would be of little use to policymakers from one civilization to the next. Easton suggests that cross-cultural civilization is out, obviously insufficient, because if the nature of man is so plastic as Easton admits, then what about future generations? No generalization based on cross-cultural research could tell us anything about future generations of man. Who can tell what the nature of man will be in an economy of plenty, or if there is no longer the possibility of war in the world? Future behavior of man cannot be determined on the basis of theories of how man acts now.

Secondly, cross-cultural research means historical studies, historical in the wider sense in that it refers not only to the past, but these studies themselves are of the utmost complexity, as you can see by the following consideration. We want to understand other societies as they are or were. You have to have a so-called frame of reference to understand them. The frame of reference

[ix] Though there are no ellipses in the transcript, the context suggests that either something is missing or that part of the sentence is inaccurate.

which is immediately at our disposal is one which stems from the present. It is a product of the Western development. If you cannot understand other civilizations, other societies, other [than] from our frame of reference, which has no other evidence except that it has proved to be handy for taking our bearings within our society, then we put this other civilization into the Procrustean bed of our preconceived notions. To understand them as they understand themselves as they are, we misunderstand them. It was called to my attention a few days ago that Mr. B.[x] of this university raised the question: What is the present-day equivalent of Greek culture? You see, after all, Greek culture is a social phenomenon; and if[20] [one] want[s] to understand a corner of civilization, one ought to consider if there is a culture there, and if so, of what kind. And of course we mean culture here in America now, and if there is an exact equivalent in another culture. Let there be a culture: we assume we have a culture A and a culture B. Then we assume that there is pottery making here and pottery making there, and the same topography for all. Are we entitled to do so? In other words, is culture in America the same thing as culture in ancient Greece? Does it fulfill the same function there? Now as Mr. von Blankenhagen knows infinitely more about these things than I do, the strict equivalent of Greek sculpture in modern American society is a certain kind of advertising which presents to you the perfect human body, male and female, and not the present-day sculpture. Therefore by comparing present-day sculpture with Greek sculpture, you would get an entirely wrong notion. The same consideration applies to other things. I will give some other examples a little bit later in a somewhat different context.

At any rate, cross-cultural research is really a mouthful. The critical foundations for cross-cultural research have not even been laid, as you can easily find out by listening critically to any anthropologist. To summarize at this point: The skepticism deplored by Easton regarding political theory, which is causal theory, is perfectly justified. It leads to what Easton calls the flight from scientific reason. That is true. I would only say that this flight is not due to a mood but based on solid argument. To mention that argument which to me is most important, Easton takes it for granted that scientific reason excludes from its scope and skill the discovery of the kind of ultimate values a society ought to pursue. It thereby removes from its competence a crucial area of human affairs. That is a good enough reason for flight from scientific reason. As a matter of fact, the flight is implied there, because if social science is by definition ignorant of the social good, he who makes the assertion encourages the flight. He himself advises us to go to other places to get the decisive information in the most important respects.

Now I shall make a few remarks about what Easton has to say on value theory. In the main, Easton accepts the generally held view, as he explicitly says, but he makes this suggestion, which is not admitted by everyone, and certainly not admitted by Max Weber, namely, that all science or all analysis of social science is based on a conceptual framework. That is generally said. But Easton says that the conceptual framework itself is based on moral premises. Now that of course raises a very grave question, because either[xi] the moral premises are self-evident—that means in principle self-evident. Then there will be the same moral premises for all men, and therefore there can be one and only one conceptual framework. But if there is a variety of moral premises,

[x] Peter von Blanckenhagen, who is mentioned by name shortly. Blanckenhagen (1909-1990) was a historian of Roman and Greek art. He emigrated to the United States from Germany in 1947 and was a visiting lecturer and professor in the Committee on Social Thought from 1947 to 1957. He also taught at Harvard and at the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University.

[xi] The "or" is presumably the variety of moral premises mentioned a few lines later.

then we will be forced into a variety of conceptual frameworks, and the unity of social science, the possibility of rational argument among different social scientists, has disappeared. In other words, that is no improvement on Max Weber. It is a kind of concession to the anti-Max Weber point of view, but it creates a difficulty which did not exist in the much clearer position of Max Weber: "Our ability to perceive certain relations among facts, however, may depend upon insight gained from immersion in one or another moral outlook. To put the same thought in a different way, certain moral premises may blind us or dull our senses to the presence of a relationship."[xii] Meaning of a factual relationship; that's why the truth or falsity of a proposition is not finally determined by the presence or absence of particular moral premises. The fact that we have been able to perceive a relationship, or even the truth or falsity of a proposition, may well depend upon these premises. That is, I think, a very grave statement. He says again: "The kind of variables which a theorist considers cogent for his theory, the type of data he selects to test it, even the kinds of relations he sees among his variables, normally show a significant relation to his moral premises."[xiii] That would seem to be a very grave statement. What happened to that famous argument from which we started last time? Agreement regarding facts, disagreement regarding values—you remember that famous thesis. But if now the possibility of seeing facts depends on perception of values regarding which there can no longer be an agreement—in other words, what Easton admits amounts to an admission that disagreement regarding facts is as necessary as disagreement regarding values, which I think, if you use that terminology, i.e., facts-values, is correct. Some people are obtuse to certain things and perceptive to others, but the usual use in social science is that we shall disregard those aspects where you need a special perceptiveness in order to talk reasonably or competently about them.

The last point I would make about Easton's book, especially since this point is made by another writer to whom I referred a short time ago, is: people who oppose the fact-value theory say that the value-fact distinction is based on the premise that all facts are of equal value according to the relativistic position. Easton denies that, but I must say I don't see with what right, because if all value principles are equally defensible, as the thesis of this positivism is, preferring one value to another is fundamentally arbitrary. And therefore that means as far as we know—and we speak only of what we know—all values are equal. One can blur that; one cannot make it disappear.

But if you take the ordinary point of view as Max Weber stated it most forcefully and as held by most social scientists today, it means that there is ultimately a variety of incompatible values.[xiv] Now if that is so, the clarifications would rather sharpen the disagreement than mitigate it. Let us take a crude example used sometimes in this discussion: the Nazi value system and the democratic system. A muddle-headed Nazi and a muddle-headed liberal democrat can get along perhaps quite easily because they are muddle-headed, but in the moment that they know what they want and what they hold good, they can't get along any longer. I don't see why the clarification in itself should contribute to agreement. If there is no possibility of rational argument and conviction as distinguished from mere propaganda and persuasion regarding values—but if there exists [or] if there is a possibility of knowledge regarding those things, there is no reason why we should make a distinction between values and facts. And that way, as we say, the discussion of values and the solution of value problems[21] has to be done in the

[xii] *Political System,* 226.
[xiii] *Political System,* 227.
[xiv] The transcript of this session is in fragments. A fragment on positivism begins here.

philosophy department, and the other has to be done in the social science department. That at most would be a bureaucratic question, which would not be a serious one.

Now I would like to summarize a point that I have to make regarding positivism by sketching what I regard as the main lines of criticism in this manner. In the first place, one has to ask the question: Is the separation of fact from value possible? And this question has a practical and a theoretical aspect. I shall not go into the practical aspect because I think you all know that; many preachers in many places defend that. I personally believe that the preachers are right in this particular place, but some people don't like to hear anything in this respect, even from preachers. This notion of our inability to find out anything valid regarding values, that this leads to nihilism—and is in fact nihilism—or has the corroding influence on society, I think it is easy to see. Someone said that the difference between the Nazis and the communists on the one hand, and liberal democracy on the other, is the difference of value systems, and that this question can in no way be subject to rational discussion and rational decision. And he says the responsible rational being could as well be a Nazi or a communist as a liberal democrat; it depends only on the fact that he was brought up—we cannot even say that he was so *fortunate* as to be brought up—in America. Mr. Sabine is a Nestor of the history of political thought in this country.[xv] Therefore there is a very beautiful lecture which he delivered on the principles of democracy. It was a very sound and interesting discussion, and I didn't recognize [in it] the author of that relativistic history. And so I asked him: What are your principles [upon which you prefer the American democratic tradition? He answered], "Fundamentally, the fact that I was reared in the American tradition"[xvi]—which is of course an impossibility, because every cannibal could give as the reason for his being a cannibal that he was reared in a cannibal tradition. That is not good enough.

I ought to mention the fact which I still regard as the practical problem here, the consequence of this distinction for political analysis: the attempts of a rational discussion of the propositions made by the Nazis, communists, and so on is abandoned because one knows in advance that such a discussion can lead nowhere. And very strange—I mean, I have never believed that this is possible, but I know that there are quite a few social scientists who believe that a rational discussion of these matters is impossible, because there are many people who are incapable of listening to arguments. Well, [take] the question of the Negroes or Jews in this country: they actually are just anti-Negro; you can't talk to that man about Negroes. [But][xvii] what has this to do with the question of values? It is a question of personal obstinacy or whatever you might call it, and has nothing to do . . . I'm sure there are people in the world who reject all kinds of factual theory for purely practical assertions because they are like that. Exactly[22] [this] kind of people would say that repudiation of certain factual errors about Negroes cannot be tolerated because it would be unpleasant for them to hear it. But that is wholly irrelevant.

But I come now to the more important of these considerations. Is the separation of facts and values justified? Is it possible to understand political phenomena without making value

[xv] George Sabine (1880-1961), American political theorist. Nestor fought in the Trojan War with Odysseus. At the beginning of a later session Strauss again refers to Sabine as "a Nestor" and explains that "Nestor is of course a term of praise . . . it means a man venerable by age and eloquence" (session 6).
[xvi] Brackets in this and the preceding sentence are in the transcript.
[xvii] Brackets in this and the preceding sentence are in the transcript.

judgments? Let me take a somewhat humorous example. Some of you may have read stories by P. G. Woodhouse and remember Jeeves, that remarkable butler. I don't hesitate to give this as an example because similar relations among human beings occur of course in political matters as well. Now is it possible to understand a brainy scheme discovered by Jeeves without passing judgment on it? Is it possible? Granted, it is much more difficult to pass judgment on, say, the United States' foreign policy than on Jeeves's brainy scheme. But why? What's the difference? Very simple. For everyone to judge the scheme of Jeeves we all have the necessary materials there in the story. We do not [always][xviii] have clear knowledge of the fact which we would have to pass judgment on. I hope everyone admits that. We do not have full knowledge of relevant facts regarding foreign policy to pass one hundred percent full judgment on it. What do we know of what is going on in the Politburo,[xix] what the private deliberations of these men really contain? Furthermore, clearly there are such schemes[23] [of which] we might even know all the relevant facts and yet they might conflict with each other, and one could say, "If we choose A, we have the disadvantage alpha; and if we choose B, we have the disadvantage beta," and we see that the advantages and disadvantages are equally great on both sides. What do we do? We toss coins one way or the other.[24] Tossing coins is of course not a value judgment, but it presupposes a value judgment, namely, of the equality of the two things.

But let me take some other simple examples. It is impossible to study the American presidents without making the distinction between great presidents and mediocrities. A man who would write a book about American presidents excluding[25] himself [from] the very possibility of making such a distinction would write an absolutely impossible and preposterous book. He wouldn't deal with American presidents; he would deal with wholly irrelevant matters, but not with the phenomenon itself. I think that this wouldn't be generally granted, that it is impossible to analyze the political actor and acts without passing judgment on them. Whether you express a judgment or not is a purely rhetorical affair and has nothing to do with the substance, because you will make the judgments, and by your story you suggested the subject. That is the main point. But someone would say: If I speak of great presidents and of mediocrities or nonentities, this is only a relative value judgment. If political life is important, then it is better to be a great president than a nonentity. But I raise this question: Can we question this premise that political life is important as long as we take political things seriously? Does not political science as such stand or fall by the premise that political things are to be taken seriously? Can we, within the realm of political science, ever question that? Just as it would seem that [the importance of] such notions as health and a good physician can[not][26] be questioned by a [physician].[xx] In medicine the problem does not arise. Can it arise in political science? But one could go beyond that and has to go beyond that. Can one seriously deny the importance of political life if we take seriously what theologically is called "this life"? And then the question arises: Maybe this life [is unimportant compared to the hereafter].[xxi] Then you would have to face the issue presented by theology, which is another matter of which students of science or philosophy cannot take cognizance.

[xviii] Brackets in the transcript.

[xix] The Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, in this case of the former Soviet Union.

[xx] The transcript reads: "can be questioned by a metaphysician," (i.e., metaphysics can question grounds and ultimate importance of other sciences).

[xxi] Brackets appear in the transcript.

That is to say, I can't study art without making value judgments. That is obvious. How could you study poetry without distinguishing between very poor rhyming and the great poem? What you could say about it would be more a bibliography of poetry or a telephone directory than a study of poetry. Now then you would again say: Well, that's also a relative judgment, because if I study art I assume that art is a value. But here again I would say: Can I assume that seriously and not only jokingly or talkingly without experiencing it, that value? And that means without knowing that it is a value. That this may conflict with the argument of Weber is [true][xxii]; that this may conflict with religious values might very well be. But what does[27] [that] mean? That we have to think about the relation between religion and art; and we have to face that issue, too. And it does not in any way dispense with making absolutely[28] [indispensable] value judgments which, within their limits, can be shown to be more reasonable than the opposite. What is the meaning of every reasonable criticism, say, of a novel or a poem, but to show in a responsible way why this is good or this is bad? That this is sometimes more difficult than the other is no proof of its impossibility. It would be very bad for all intellectual pursuits if things which are difficult are rejected for this reason. The fact-value distinction[29] [would be] meaningful only if it were impossible to know anything about values and if it were possible to study social phenomena as social phenomena without ever making any value judgments. No man has ever succeeded or intended to do that.

Especially in the study of the history of human thought, we see that all the time. We cannot make a distinction between facts without making value judgments. I mean such a little thing, that we say, "I choose Montesquieu." That is a value judgment. It is important; not only important in that many people had talked about and copied him, but [in that][xxiii] he had a particularly comprehensive understanding, a particularly perceptive mind, and so on—all[30] [the] various other intellectual virtues which we discern in reading him and which make him worthwhile. And not only is it indispensable for intellectual content, it is even of crucial importance for the technique of procedure. If we know that the writer of a certain book was a very profound thinker, and there is another book [which is] very stupid and careless, our attitude in this event may be entirely different. Think of the case which happens all the time when you read a book. We are confronted with the ambiguity of contradiction. You are compelled to handle it very differently if you know that one book was written by a man who wrote five thousand pages every year, dictating to his wife at the typewriter, and the other was the work of two years, as [was] Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws*[31]. And you also know this about the intellectual capacity.

Furthermore, I would have to consider what I would call invisible value judgments, which ultimately are those value judgments which are implied in the seemingly neutral attitude of the neutral conceptual scheme. I mention only one example. Some writers of this school make a fundamental distinction in political matters between autocracy and democracy and mean this[xxiv] as an ethically neutral or value-free social science. Now that approach is almost redundant, because the alternative to democracy is described in such a way that every sane reader would say, "Autocracy is an abomination"; and of course we have to accept democracy. But the grotesque thing is that it presents itself as ethically neutral. That is exactly the very crude case

[xxii] Brackets appear in the transcript.
[xxiii] Brackets appear in the transcript.
[xxiv] In the transcript, "this" is in brackets.

you will find put by Kelsen in the *General Theory of the State*.[xxv] Max Weber's famous distinction of three types of legitimacy—charismatic, rational, and traditional[xxvi]—which presents itself in a perfectly neutral and unprejudiced scheme, is based in a more subtle way but nonetheless on a certain moral taste. On the basis of this distinction—which is in no way self-evident and which in addition is not very helpful, I think, for our analysis but which recommended itself to Max Weber on moral grounds—the implication of course is that the charismatic is the truly highest and the most creative. That has something to do with a certain notion of man as a free being. Needless to say, *that* social science cannot avoid or could not avoid value judgments in fact. We must never forget that when we speak about political science, and in particular that one part of social science [which] is psychology, including psychopathology. And there it can afford scientific value judgments, which they seem to be allowed to employ to determine whether one is sufficiently adjusted or maladjusted. If this is not a value judgment, I don't know what it is. That it is intellectually arrived at by scientific methods would not affect us in any way. Everyone who understands these terms and applies them prefers naturally the adjusted to the maladjusted, making allowance for the trivial possibility that maladjusted people may have certain possibilities, such as maybe some particularly great artists. But stated only in terms of this problem, to be well-adjusted is better than to be maladjusted. What is the implication? Not the abandonment of value judgment, which can never be brought about, but the substitution of an unreasonable value judgment for a reasonable one. I think the distinction between the well-adjusted and maladjusted is an unreasonable distinction, because you have to ask the question: Adjusted to *what*? There are kinds of societies to which we ought to be maladjusted, I hope. To take an extreme case, if a child is brought up in a brothel, the less adjusted he or she is the better. Or if you take another example from ordinary parlance: a slick operator is a little man who is well-adjusted, otherwise he couldn't very well be a slick operator. But we imply also that a slick operator is not the most desirable human person, and our value judgments, our basic orientations must make allowance for that.

The second question which I would submit is this: Can we leave it at saying that absolute values are unknown or unsure? Because we have to examine the arguments given. In this chapter to which I have referred you, I have tried to examine Max Weber's arguments. I can only say it is unbelievable that a man, a scholar of the greatness of Max Weber could have been impressed by those arguments. It is in the . . . to which I referred last time where he is more careful: he says only that absolute values are unknown. The consequence which can be drawn from that, that there are unknowables, has never been proved by anyone. It's just a myth. The maximum you can say is that there are unknowns, and it is certainly true [that] prior to investigation they are unknown. But almost everything, if it is not wholly trivial, is unknown without investigation. But even if it is granted that there are grave difficulties, only one conclusion can be drawn, [and] that is that we must think about them, and not act just like a babe in the woods because of the difficulty.

The third point one has to raise in the discussion of the possibilities is in a way a fundamental premise, namely, that general knowledge is not scientific knowledge as defined by the natural

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[xxv] Hans Kelsen, *General Theory of Law and State*, trans. Anders Wedberg (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945).

[xxvi] Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958).

scientists. The implication is this. We know things wholly independent of science. We call this knowledge prescientific knowledge; that is to say, knowledge of everyday life. Sometimes people call that commonsense knowledge. Now [there exists][xxvii] the possibility as a matter of principle that prescientific knowledge is fundamentally defective. If you want to understand that fundamental premise, you would have to go back to Descartes and read certain of his principles. One must doubt of everything. To Descartes, all prescientific knowledge is fundamentally unreliable because fundamentally defective, but you must doubt[32] everything and find a point beyond commonsense knowledge from which we can start. The crucial question presented by Descartes says this: All prescientific knowledge is fundamentally false because of the fundamental baseness and imprecision of common language. Science, true knowledge, is possible only if there exists an absolutely first-class language. And only one such language is possible, and that is mathematics, so that only mathematical knowledge could be strictly knowledge.

Certainly in this form this principle is underlined in certain forms of present-day social science. I believe it is easy to see that we couldn't take a single step in any single social science without presupposing the validity of prescientific knowledge. If someone may, when he speaks of congressional elections, denote a congressional election and what congressional elections are wholly independent of any signs, the . . . of fellow Americans which we have studied are different to him, but no significant clarification of these terms is made. Or [such] terms as "party," "property," the most simple of these are known by people independent[ly] of scientific knowledge or investigation. We take it for granted in public opinion polls. People are polled. What people are is known by the investigator. You can say that it is trivial, but it is decisive [and without it][xxviii] the whole enterprise would be impossible. The consequence of the refection of commonsense knowledge that is demanded by the more rigorous positivists is simply triviality, for the following reason: because you cannot accept the important facts which we know, because they are not scientifically demonstrable; therefore you must expend an enormous amount of labor in proving certain things which every person knows. I want to give an example. One of our former students is in the American army, and he found that in the library there was Maynard Helper's investigation.[xxix] And he read portions of it to himself and read it to some other soldiers, and they could not understand why such an effort was made, when they could have found out by asking any soldier in the last war. But that wouldn't have been scientific.

And the last point I would make, because it is very crucial in speaking of Easton's position, is that the positivistic principle which I would call the "necessity of positivism" transforms itself into historicism. In the current approach of this kind of scientific social scientist, our prescientific knowledge of man and human affairs is historical[ly bound] to the specific situation because he is thought to be culture-bound. And we have seen in the study of Easton that these people expect salvation from cross-cultural research, so then we can see universals. One must go to a radical position on this point as a direct consequence. There is the problem of the frame of reference, as we said before: the frame of reference which we need for an analysis of the culture of civilization stems from our own society. It is in principle inadequate for the understanding of other societies. Each culture or civilization must be understood in the light of its own principles if it is to be

[xxvii] Brackets appear in the transcript.
[xxviii] Brackets appear in the transcript.
[xxix] The editor was unable to identify Maynard Helper.

understood properly. Or we might say there must be as many frames of reference as there are cultures. A culture is that[33] [which] it understands[34] itself [as], and each frame of reference for the understanding of this culture must grow out of long familiarity with the culture in question. Otherwise we don't understand it and we speak only superficially about it; otherwise we tend to force generalizations taken from ourselves.

Example: on the basis of Western development, we discovered that the so-called economic factor plays a very great role in politics . . . Now is it important? We cannot assume that. Maybe that is just culturally bound—that is, characteristic of modern Western civilization. Let us take another example, one which has been noticed: ancient Greece. We have one document here telling us something about the most important political event in Greece, that is, about the Peloponnesian War: Thucydides's *History*. Thucydides says hardly anything about economics. We know that people have their economic problems, but that was not the reason why the[35] [Lacedaemonians][xxx] went to war and the others followed. In Thucydides we have an unusually sober man, and I think that this is generally admitted. The question, "Who put up the trophies after a battle?" "Who was in possession of the field of battle?"—that made a terrific difference. For the Greeks that was important, and also for Thucydides because he mentions it all the time. He says much more about these ridiculous aspects—who was in particular possession in the field of battle after the battle[xxxi]—than about trade rivalry, for example. So the question arises: Who is right in this matter, Thucydides or Karl Marx? Obviously something depends on the answer; otherwise we can't say anything about Greek culture. And could it not be said that the economic factor was really relatively unimportant, almost subordinate in a fundamentally different situation of the past? The question tends to turn itself on whether Thucydides can be trusted or not—not as a Greek authority, but whether his judgment can be trusted. The question: Can we know Greek society on the basis of Thucydides's study?

One could give many other examples, which would also show this: In the moment that it is admitted that by studying only our contemporaries in our civilization we never arrive at uniformities regarding human behavior, we admit that the basic research is of course historical research; and historical research, to be of any value, must be thorough and reliable, and that means an intricate study. The basis of social science thus understood is necessarily history. We could even go a step further and say history of thought, and even still more precisely, history of philosophy, if it is true that the thought of other cultures is more definitely accessible to us than the other thing. Take the defeats, the battles, or the peoples [. . .][xxxii] of dynasties: you have to read documents; and in order to read them, in order to understand what the historians or chroniclers meant, you have to understand their point of view, the[ir] purpose[36] in writing their chronicles. And you don't get [this] out of their chronicles alone; you have to consider their whole intellectual background. It means you have to understand the thought of their period, the history of thought.

[xxx] In the original transcript: "Thosimonians [Athenians?]." As the transcriber was aware, "Thosimonians" does not correspond to any group in Thucydides's history. While the transcriber's suggestion of "Athenians" is possible, the more plausible name seems "Lacedaemonians" (Spartans), since technically they "went to war" first. One could also suggest the less plausible "Peloponnesians," which, like "Lacedaemonians," refers to the Spartan side in the war.

[xxxi] In the transcript: "(who was in particular possession in the field of battle after the battle?)"

[xxxii] There is a question mark in the transcript.

And furthermore, if that is granted, it can be easily shown that [to understand] the history of philosophic thought, in spite of the tremendous difficulties that it has, is fundamentally a simpler proposition than to understand the history of thought of a social class. It is a much more problematical and hypothetical thing to establish the thought, say, of the British middle classes in the seventeenth century than the thought of Thomas Hobbes, obviously. I don't say that it is easy to establish the thought of Hobbes, but it is easier because the problem is much more limited and you are not confronted with the hopeless question of what is the average opinion of the Greeks, which can never be settled, and so on. One can say . . . that social science is presented by the methodology of the social sciences as consisting of a body of propositions, of true propositions. What distinguishes true propositions from untrue ones is determined by rules of logic and scientific procedure. But that is obviously a very inadequate indication of what true social science is, because these true propositions, assuming that they are true, are the answers to questions, and this definition of the social sciences does not tell us anything about the status of the questions. Now what about the questions? I take again the accepted theory: the questions depend primarily upon the frame of reference, on the categories the social scientist in question uses; and these categories in their turn depend upon the direction of interest, and the direction of interest depends upon the historical situation or cultural fixation.

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[1] Deleted "would be."
[2] Deleted "this much."
[3] Deleted "whereas."
[4] Deleted "what."
[5] Deleted "of."
[6] Deleted "he."
[7] Moved "what."
[8] Deleted "they."
[9] Moved "he says."
[10] Deleted "Now."
[11] Deleted "hardly is."
[12] Deleted "descernative."
[13] Deleted "society."
[14] Deleted "at"
[15] Deleted "what."
[16] Deleted "A."
[17] Moved "beyond custom." Deleted "some mechanism."
[18] Moved "That."
[19] Deleted ""[it (?)]."
[20] Deleted "you."
[21] Deleted ", that."
[22] Deleted "these,"
[23] Deleted "that."
[24] Deleted "But."
[25] Moved "from."
[26] Deleted "metaphysician."
[27] Deleted "it."
[28] Deleted "indefensible."
[29] Deleted "is."
[30] Deleted "other and."
[31] Moved "was."
[32] Deleted "of."
[33] Deleted "what."

[34] Moved “as.”
[35] Deleted “Thosimonians [Athenians?].”
[36] Deleted “of them.”

Session 4:[i] **February 1954**
Historicism

Leo Strauss: We never arrive at uniformities, uniformities regarding human behavior. We admit that the basic research is historical research; and historical research, to be of any value, must be thorough and reliable, and that means an infinite study. The basis of social science thus understood is necessarily history. We could even go a step further and say "history of thought," and even still more precisely, "history of philosophy," if it is true that the thought of other cultures is more directly accessible to us than the other things. Let us take such a simple thing, say, the battles[1] or the sequences of dynasties. We have to read documents. In order to read them, in order to understand what the historians or chroniclers meant, we have to understand their point of view, the[ir] purpose[2] in writing their chronicles and histories. That you don't get out of the chronicles alone; you have to consider the whole intellectual background, as people say. It means that you have to understand the thought of that period, the history of thought. And furthermore, if that is granted, it can easily be shown that [to understand] the history of philosophic thought, in spite of the tremendous difficulties which it has, is fundamentally a simpler proposition than to understand the thought, say, of a social class. It is a much more problematic and hypothetical thing, say, to establish the thought of the British middle class of the seventeenth century than to establish the thought of Thomas Hobbes, obviously. I mean, I don't say that it is easy to establish the thought of Hobbes, but it [is] easier because the problem is much more limited, and you are not confronted with the hopeless question of what is the average opinion of a group, which can never be settled, and so on . . .

One can say, showing the necessity of positivism, if it was to be scientific really, to transform itself into historicism, also as follows . . . [social] science is presented by the methodology of the social sciences as consisting of a body of propositions, of true propositions. What distinguishes true propositions from untrue ones is determined by rules of logic and scientific procedure. But that is obviously a very inadequate indication of what social science is, because these true propositions, assuming that they are true, are the answers to questions, and this definition of social science doesn't tell us anything about the status of the questions. Now what about the questions? I take again the accepted theory. The questions depend primarily upon the frame of reference, on the categorical scheme used by the social sciences in question. And these categories in their turn depend on the direction of interest, and this direction of interest depends on the historical situation, the cultural situation. So we have then social science as a composite, consisting of answers which are assumed to be universally valid, established; and on the other hand, another part which is the questions, which are historically relative. One cannot leave it at that. That was fundamentally the view stated by Max Weber, but one cannot leave it at that, for this reason.[3] Even granted that the answers are true and their truth is sufficiently guaranteed by rules of logic and scientific methodology, the relevance of the answers depends certainly on the questions, and therewith ultimately on the direction of interests and on the historical situation. So what would it mean? It would mean that a certain body of knowledge which is, let us assume, one hundred percent true ceases to be of any relevance, acquires the status of a telephone

[i] The transcript notes that this is a "portion of" a lecture on historicism.

directory if the interest is changed. So the life of the science is in the questions rather than in the answers, and this life is a historically varied, relative[ii] life. So from this point of view, it is necessary to go beyond positivism and to turn to that position which I called "historicism." Before I do that, I would like to know whether I made sufficiently clear these points.

Student: With regard to this matter of cross-cultural research and the difficulties involved in it, it seems to me highly more difficult than the problems you pose continually, when you say that we shall not be [. . .] with certain of the values simply because of the difficulty of [. . .] those values.

LS: Oh sure, you are perfectly right, and I don't believe that I clarified sufficiently this point. I only said that some of these scholars who said that the way out of this predicament is cross-cultural research do not necessarily have a clear notion of the magnitude of that enterprise. I'm all in favor of anthropological and historical studies, if properly understood, but that is not something that is . . . in other words, that are other objections to Easton's proposal. I limit myself only to this point. We would have to have an adequate knowledge of all other civilizations or cultures, because we could even dream of preparing that causal theory of which he thinks. You know? Because only then would we have established the uniform and generally human character of certain trends which we know to begin with only as mid-twentieth-century American. Is this not clear?

Student: Well, I see your point of view, but I'm not sure that I completely accept it myself. It seems to me possible to get out of the Western . . . clock, so called, and to see various other peoples, various other cultures, and to see that it varies in other cultures from which we can make . . .

LS: Yes, but what is the significance? If, for example, you would see that there are misuses of power, the inclination of people in power to misuse their power, we find that sometimes in our society, [and] we find similar things in other societies. Now, how far would this be helpful? Because the relative importance, and that is the significance of the . . . depends on the character of the society as a whole, doesn't it? For example, it is of considerable significance[iii] that in a given society what is happening on the politically highest realm is of no interest to the masses of the people. I remember a description of Hindu life in former centuries, where, you know, there were all kinds of things going on between kings and conquerors and whatnot, and of course people suffered somewhat from all that but didn't pay much attention. Now that makes, obviously, all the difference, whether this is important to them or whether it is not important. Well, quite a few trends[iv] of this kind can be established easily, but they are not helpful because that we know emphatically.[v]

Student: [. . .]

LS: I dealt at some length on this example of the economic factor in Greek culture to indicate how this problem would have to be handled, and how complex it . . . is, because it would depend

[ii] In the transcript: "(relative?)"
[iii] In the transcript: "significance?"
[iv] In the transcript: "trends (traces?)"
[v] In the transcript: "emphatically?"

ultimately not on whether Thucydides mentions this or does not mention it; that in itself is not decisive . . . For in any event he may have been a man of insufficient judgment, and therefore you must know him much better to say how far you can trust his judgment. Similar considerations, I believe, would apply in all other cases. Now if you mean another point, "Can we not discern here and now, by looking at ourselves and the people with whom we live, certain things which are essential to men as men?" I would say: "Yes, we can," but not by the methods of social science. If I observe a few times typical characteristics of male and female behavior, which we can do, and think about them, and read then suddenly a Chinese story, or a Greek story, or a biblical story in which the same things are presupposed . . . that certainly, added to my reflection as to why that is so, makes me certain that this is a universal trait, though certainly compatible with the fact that there are feminine men and masculine women, which creates a minor difficulty. [4]But this is not yet scientific, because this kind of reflection on the nature of men—the essential characteristics of male and female, [5]connected ultimately with the . . . different function of the two sexes and with the process of generation and procreation, is not permissible—as you can see from the Kinsey report,[vi] which is very unfair, because that is even contradicted by quite a few social scientists, I gather—you know, where simply so-called normal sexuality is regarded as one simply accidental form of sexuality. Well, perhaps in Freud it is the same thing . . . Do you see my point? I don't say that cultural research is necessary for these reasons, but I say that given this approach to human affairs, cross-cultural research is the only way out; and if it is so, one has to do it with the utmost care, and then it is a very complex and difficult but not impossible position.

Student: . . .

LS: I regard this whole argument as[6] only *ad hominem*, if you know what that means: taking the positivistic position and criticizing its proponents from their own premises. I certainly would say this. I believe that if the history of philosophy is studied with intelligence, this alone would liberate one from the positivistic prejudice. That is my position, so I would say that I could induce a man, a young man, on these grounds to study the history of philosophy so that he can better do cross-cultural research and would have some expectations that he would learn something more important by the means of his study than by the presupposed ends . . . But still, take the . . . I would say this: I think it is this, that the mere fact that the external artifacts,[vii][7] say, pottery, and the inscriptions and this kind of thing, need interpretation: an inference that these people have pottery; when you find pottery in the corresponding geological . . . strata . . . that is sound. But what did the pottery mean, and why did they make it this way or that way? That remains hypothetic[al] and fundamentally questionable as long as we do not have literary sources. Therefore the literary sources—and preferably of course complete ones, not just isolated fragments and so forth, but complete books, complete poems, and this kind of thing—the literary sources have the greater intelligibility, more than the other things . . . and are more valuable as a clue.[viii] But again, I would say that among the literary sources the most direct accessibility attaches to those things, to those thoughts which exist already there in a conceptual element—in the element of conceptuality, if I may say so, so that what Aristotle means by necessity is more

[vi] Biologist Alfred Kinsey published his research on human sexuality in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* in 1948, followed by *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953).
[vii] In the transcript: "artifacts? (effects?)"
[viii] In the transcript: "(valuable as a clue?)"

directly accessible than if you would find the term "necessary" in the context of a tragedy, so that there is not the possibility of defining it in the way in which Aristotle would define it. [8]Let me state it differently. Social scientists, as social scientists, live in an element of conceptuality. They have therefore an element in common with all other men of all other ages and cultures who also thought in that element. For this reason I would say that the history of thought, and especially of conceptual thought, has a methodic priority compared with others, if that's the . . .

Student: This would then be just a stopping point—

LS: No, no, if it is important, and I think to a certain extent it is, to understand preliterate societies and the thought they have about everything, then doubtless they must be studied. But I would say that the proper training for such studies, and the proper perspective for such studies, we could not get from them. I will show this as follows. If it is our task to understand another culture or civilization, that means of course to understand it as it is and not to make an arbitrary construct[ix] which is sufficient for purposes of trade, for example, or any other external relation. But if we want to understand this particular primitive people, we must understand them as they understand themselves. Now that is in one sense impossible, because the mere presence of the investigator changes the situation. Look, you come as an anthropologist to a tribe never before visited[x] by a man of this kind, say, in South America. They know that people sometimes come to them, say, to trade with them or to hide among them because they have committed a murder at home or this sort of thing, but they have never seen a man who came to them exclusively in order to find out how they live. And I would go a step further. I would regard this as possible: that the idea that one could do that has never occurred to them. In the moment that this idea occurs to their chieftain to whom you talk, he is a changed man.

Now to state it differently, let me express this in terms of the question of the frame of reference. We have to begin with the choice between two kinds of frame of reference, either the one supplied by our civilization—and that's no good. For example, we make a distinction between morality and law; this is quite common to Western man. It is hopeless in understanding other cultures to make such a distinction. I don't say in all other[xi] [. . .] but in quite a few it is simply meaningless. To understand anything means to start from a serious or fundamental distinction, from a fundamental articulation. Now if this articulation is taken from your own society and is there justified, it doesn't mean of course that it is applicable to any other society. Maybe it is not even applicable to an earlier period in your own society. So what is the alternative? The alternative would be to find that frame of reference which fits that society.

Now, how can we understand that? I believe as follows. We address to that society the question: What things do you regard as most important? And we find perhaps a number of things, two or three, and from that we start. Now assume for one moment that you speak to people who never framed for themselves the question: What is most important? That's possible[9]—I mean, that requires already a certain stage of the development of the human mind for the question to be raised in this fashion, [10]that they understand the meaning of that. In the case of certain societies, one could say that the mere presence of an anthropologist affects the subject to be investigated.

[ix] In the transcript: "construct (of ours?)"
[x] In the transcript: "(studied?/investigated?)"
[xi] In the transcript: (days?)"

In other cases the problem is not as great. But take a book like the Old Testament, easily accessible and known to[11] the West through this long tradition. Now it is certainly very difficult to understand Plato and Aristotle, there is no doubt about that, but it is much easier to understand them than to understand the Old Testament. I mean, you can understand that the prophets say you should be just, and so everyone knows more or less what that means. But there are certain fundamental premises which they make. Why is it so important to be just? It has something to do with God, about which they do not speak the language of philosophy in any way, and certain transformations are necessary immediately[12] in order to understand it in the way in which we, as social scientists, must understand it. The gulf is much less radical if you are confronted with, say, Locke. And I think that similar considerations would apply to other cultures as well.

So this matter of cross-cultural research is not such a simple quest—that is what I wanted to say—if it is taken seriously. I didn't want to say more than this. In the first place, I believe it wouldn't help any, for the reason given, if it would tell us only about man as he has been hitherto. And if man's nature is radically malleable, this won't help us, because we want to know something about what is possible in the future. All action has to do with the future, and therefore [so does] all political science, which is ultimately directed toward action. But apart from that, if we disregard this great difficulty, what I wanted to say is this. [13]Cross-cultural research is then necessary to establish the factual foundations of a solid course in theory. This solid course in theory has to wait for many, many generations before we can even begin to elaborate it. Or we don't take that reference to cross-cultural research seriously and say only that [it] is just a word, but that I can't believe; I mean, it is obviously necessary to make such a research.[xii] That was the only point I wanted to make.

So for the reasons given, it seems to me that historicism, as I called it, is at least aware of fundamental difficulties of which positivism is unaware; and therefore from this point of view it is preferable to it. But whether historicism, in the process of correcting the fundamental fallacies of positivism, does not lead to equally difficult and hopeless situations, that is another matter. I would like to discuss this next time.

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[1] Deleted ", the battles."
[2] Deleted "of them."
[3] Deleted "Because."
[4] Deleted "Still,."
[5] Deleted "is."
[6] Deleted "one."
[7] Deleted "(effects?)."
[8] Deleted "For example, take such a crude example—no,."
[9] Deleted "and they don't have to be—."
[10] Deleted "I mean"
[11] Deleted "(through?)."
[12] Deleted "(really?)"
[13] Deleted "That is."

[xii] In the transcript: "(such a research?)"

Session 5: January 18, 1954
On Karl Mannheim, George Sabine, and Carl Becker

Student: [Question about Mannheim][i]

LS: Well, I read Mannheim[ii] many decades ago, but it seems to me that what he tried to do was this, to say [that] relationism is a relativism without the nasty implications of relativism. But whether he succeeded in that by making this distinction is another question. In other words, relationism would merely mean that there is a relation of every doctrine to a particular historical situation, and this relation itself does not condemn the doctrine to mere relativity. In the ordinary relativism, the relativity of a doctrine means a limitation of its validity, but Mannheim tried to put the emphasis—and I'm speaking from memory—not on the limiting character of the situation but on the opportunity of *seeing* what a particular situation gives. He tried to say this: It is always truth that is seen in every particular period, but in a limited way. But in the more vulgar relativism, there is no question of truth or untruth but just ideologies without any cognitive value. But whether Mannheim succeeded in any way, I doubt very much. I remember distinctly that what Mannheim leads to is this: To see the truth about a given situation. He did not seek more; that is, he did not seek the absolute truth. He says: Society consists of various groups, social groups and classes, and each has a partial truth. He did not say, as a Marxist would say, for example, that there is one class which is able to see the situation as it is and the others have merely ideologies. No, the conservatives see something, but they are blind to other things; the most revolutionary part of society sees certain things but are blind to others. In order to get a true picture, you must achieve a synthesis of all these partial pictures. How does he get this picture? The answer is: By dialectics. By arguments between the different parts of society, there will gradually arise a complete picture. And the vehicles of the dialectic are a third class which he calls the intellectuals, who are not so much rooted in a particular class to be unable to appreciate the point of view of other classes. It was in this context that this notion of relationism was developed by Mannheim.

But fundamentally this question amounts to a distinction between two kinds of historicism, a very crude type and a very sophisticated type. But Mannheim is not sophisticated enough. It was a popularization of the view presented by Ernst Troeltsch in his book on historicism, which is not translated into English but which is about to be translated.[iii] One would have to go back at least

[i] As noted by the transcriber.
[ii] Karl Mannheim (1893-1947), Hungarian-born sociologist, author of *Ideology and Utopia: an introduction to the sociology of knowledge*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (New York : Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936 [1929]).
[iii] Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), German Protestant theologian and sociologist of philosophy of history; author of *Historismus und seine Probleme* (1922), [*Historicism and Its Problems*] and the posthumously published lectures to have been given in 1923, *Der Historismus und seine Überwindung* (literally, *Historicism and its Overcoming*). The English translation to which Strauss refers appears to be *Christian*

to Troeltsch to clarify that problem. If I am not mistaken, one could say that ordinary relativism holds that all these views have no cognitive value whatever—mere ideologies; whereas relationism says: No, they see truth, but a partial truth. But that is of no great help if we don't see a way from the partial truth, which is of course also partial untruth, to a total truth. And this is not shown by a mere reference to the fact that there are some people in society who could do it, intellectuals, without telling them how they could go about it.

Student: (Would they allow)[iv] that within this framework there could be such conditions prevailing that the intellectuals could get the complete truth?

LS: Yes, about the situation. But how can you have that without being able to judge, for example, whether the overall situation is one of decay or health, which would be the most important truth about the situation? You must create a synthesis between an atheist Marxist and a Catholic. Yes? But Mannheim never shows that. Now if he spoke in terms of a parliamentarian compromise between a Catholic party and a Communist party, that's easy: given[1] sufficient pressure from other sides, you will always get all kinds of compromises; but the question is not of politics, but of truth. No,[2] [Mannheim's idea] was a kind of ideology of popular front in Germany with a definite leftish bias, an emasculated Marxism you could say, and it had a certain appeal politically.

Student: [Question or comment about Weber][v]

LS: For example, Weber refers to Babeuf and the problem of social justice.[vi] He refuses as a matter of principle to consider what is socially beneficent when he discusses problems of justice, and this I rejected. This has nothing to do in itself with pragmatism. Justice is concerned with the common good, with the good of society, and we must take into consideration how certain policies or principles of policy will affect society as a whole. I did not go beyond this, and I don't believe that this means pragmatism. In Weber's notion of justice, every reference to the common good is absent, and that I believe is a perfectly arbitrary and unreasonable concept of justice. What I suggested but did not deal with exhaustively was this: the only thing that approaches the proof of the insolubility of value conflicts in Weber is only the conflict between an other-worldly ethics and a this-worldly ethics, an ethics based on revelation and an ethics not based on revelation. That is the only serious problem he raises. The other problems, such as the *Fleurs du Mal*,[vii] that is not an interesting problem, it seems to me. It is certainly not a political problem. Even if one goes beyond the political, one could still say that it is not a serious problem, for a serious problem is not whether some beautiful things may [or may] not be incompatible with some morally good things, but the fundamental question is whether there is a necessary conflict between the morally good and the aesthetically good. If there is a necessary conflict, that would first have to be proved. But if there is no necessary conflict, then one can

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Thought: Its History and Application, Baron F. von Hügel's translation of *Der Historismus und seine Überwindung* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957).

[iv] This is it appears in the transcript.

[v] The transcriber notes: "(stuff about Weber)"

[vi] François-Noël Babeuf (1760-1797), French revolutionary and journalist whose ideas have been considered early examples of anarchist and communist revolutionary principles.

[vii] Strauss might be referring to "Politics as a Vocation"; see *From Max Weber*, 147-148.

rightly say that what is both morally good *and* aesthetically good is preferable to only one of these things, and we can leave things which are morally good and aesthetically unattractive and vice versa more or less to their fate. Only if there is a fundamental incompatibility between the two things, which Weber never says, and still less never proved . . .

So now a few summarizing remarks about positivism before we go over to the problem of historicism. Positivism limits in an arbitrary manner the subject matter of the social sciences. It does this in the first place by the exclusion of value judgments, and in the second place by the exclusion of prescientific knowledge of political things. The exclusions are undertaken for the sake of scientific knowledge of political things, and scientific knowledge is sometimes understood to mean knowledge of the uniformities of political behavior. This is based on the unproved and undiscussed premise that the uniformities of political behavior are the political[ly] interesting and relevant things. They may very well be the least interesting things, because all political behavior is determined by the regimes, by the whole social and political order within which it takes place. Therefore it is not reasonable to assume to begin with that what takes place equally in all regimes is really the politically most important. It is much more sound and much more cautious to start from the variety of regimes as a fundamental fact and to try to understand their differences and their order, and this is indeed inseparable from raising the question of what is the best regime. This is as a brief summary [as I can give] of why I believe positivism in an arbitrary manner narrows down the original breadth of political philosophy.

But positivism, however, has one attractive quality, if I may say so—that is, attractive to reasonable men—and that is: It maintains the idea of science, in however narrow and decayed [a] form. To this extent we can say and we must say that positivism is heir to Plato. Let us not hesitate to say this. Plato's fundamental premise was said to be, by someone who knew something of these matters, that there is a pure mind, a pure mind which we do not always have but which we can develop in ourselves, pure mind which grasps the pure truth.[viii] Or in Plato's own presentation: man is able to ascend from the cave of prejudice and opinion to the light of the sun. Positivism maintains that in the very idea of scientific knowledge as opposed to non- or prescientific knowledge; it is derivative from this Platonic notion. But there are crucial differences, and I shall mention one or two which are important in our present context.

In the first place, according to positivism the subject matter of social science is radically historical. Why? Because man, as understood by positivism, is infinitely malleable. There is no human nature to speak of. Of course there are stomach and eyes and that sort of thing; as far as man's mental make-up is concerned almost everything is subject to change. There is no natural end of man, as Plato would say. Nor is there even an end which man naturally posits on the basis of the most elementary urges, which was the line taken by men like Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau; for example, the desire for self-preservation, which is not a full end for man, of course, but is a beginning, a natural beginning, but a natural beginning which leads to certain conclusions which we may then call the rational end of man, an end which is not arbitrary. From the positivistic point of view there are no such ends, because man is now radically malleable, so malleable that all his ends depend on the peculiar character of the society to which he belongs.

[viii] On Plato's premise that there is a pure mind, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), preface, 2. (Henceforth *BGE*)

We can say that the subject matter of social science, as positivism explains it, is radically historical.

We have to consider the contradiction between the two aims of positivism, uniformity of behavior and infinite malleability. Now if man is infinitely malleable, the idea of uniform behavior is absurd, and vice versa. But while one can say that on the whole present-day positivism is characterized by this unresolved contradiction, we can say that the general tendency seems to be in the favor of the infinite malleability rather than the uniformity of behavior. So let us take this as a typical expression: Social science always investigates man, and man always appears in a peculiar and historical shape. We do not find man as man unhistorically determined. To summarize this point, present-day social science positivism tends to conceive of the subject matter of the social sciences as radically historical, but it believes that it itself is not subject to the historical process, that it transcends it. But one cannot leave it at that, and the next step, the step that leads beyond positivism, can be established as follows. The pure mind of Plato, or in more modern language, the anonymous observer—that is, the scientific observer—is a part of the whole. He must be conceived of by the principles of this science as a product of antecedent causes, of causes which are ultimately of a nonmental character: some evolutionary process which brought about this thing we then call the human mind. Now this particular being, man, a part of the whole, cannot get out of that part and view the whole freely from a point quasi-outside the whole. That is impossible. But man is always a part of a certain place, at a certain time, and that determines his thinking.

I have only to use a technical term to permit you to learn what I'm speaking about: sociology of knowledge. Now what is sociology of knowledge? An attempt to understand science scientifically. After all, if science is the overriding consideration, science itself must be understood scientifically. The methodology of the science does not give you that, because it does not tell you the causes of science. From this point of view, once we try to understand science scientifically we are eventually driven to say that all science rests ultimately on nontheoretical premises, on nontheoretical assumptions; and that is then concerned[ix] with the inner analysis of science itself, which traces science to fundamental hypotheses which can never become certainties. I'm not speaking now of particular hypotheses which can be validated or invalidated, but fundamental ones. The most important example would be the principle of causality, which from the point of view of this science can never be more than a fundamental hypothesis and can never cease to be one. Now in other words, if it is true that science ultimately rests on certain premises which can no longer be proven and which can no longer be validated, then we would have to say that science itself rests on metaphysical foundations. This would mean that science partakes ultimately of the character of metaphysics and it would have the peculiar historical relativity of metaphysics. All this to say, again, that positivism is defenseless against historicism. The other argument I gave last time, taken chiefly from the substantive problems: You want to establish uniformities, you do not want to mistake the data of the mid-twentieth-century America for human nature itself—that is, for man as man—so you must[3] [conduct] cross-cultural research, and that means historical studies. And this also leads to the consequence that positivism transforms itself into historicism. Therefore, if the discussion is between the positivist and the real historical relativist, the latter always has an edge.

[ix] In the transcript: "concerned (?)"

Now what then is this historicist position in its pure form? To find a pure historicist is very rare, unlike the situation among positivists, especially in this country. Its thesis is this: Science and the world of science are not the fundamental subjects. The world of science means of course the world as seen or investigated by science. Science and the world of science belong to a large whole, and that is human life. Human life is essentially a specific life, a life of this society here or that society there, and that is what people mean by historical life. Human life is always the life of a specific culture or a specific civilization. Therefore, to live as a human being means to belong to a culture or civilization. You are probably told these things in the anthropology courses, but we must coordinate these things with the courses going on in some other departments. To live as a human being means to belong to a certain culture and therefore to have adopted certain values, namely, the values of one's own culture or civilization. It is therefore absolutely impossible to think in a value-free manner, because the values are implied in your fundamental orientation as a thinking being.

I explain this somewhat differently. All understanding and all knowledge, however scientific or limited, presupposes a frame of reference, a horizon, a comprehensive vision within which understanding and knowing can take place. I can't see this tree without having a previous awareness of here and there, space, things in space—and more than that, of an ordered whole of the world. Only such a comprehensive vision makes possible any seeing, any observation, any orientation, whether on a prescientific or scientific level. This "comprehensive vision of the whole," which is an attempt to translate the German word *Weltanschauung*, cannot be validated by reasoning because it is the basis of all reasoning. There is of necessity a variety of such comprehensive views, and in principle each is as legitimate as the other. The difficulty is this: Where do we stand when we make such a statement? The typical historicist would say this: We never stand outside of it; we always have chosen such a comprehensive view. It is necessary to choose one, because neutrality or suspense of judgment is impossible: we could not say or see anything without having made such a fundamental choice. Without the choice of a fundamental view, no understanding of any kind is possible. Now strictly speaking, we cannot choose among different views; a single comprehensive view is imposed upon us by fate, by history. The horizon within which our understanding takes place is produced by my fate, that is, the fate of society, in most cases, but it might also be the fate of the individual. All human thought depends ultimately on fate, on something that thought cannot master and whose workings we cannot understand.

Now in one way this is at the opposite pole from positivism, because science as a pursuit in principle common to all men is abandoned. In all earlier thought, positivistic and earlier, as scientists we do not belong to a particular culture: science is an effort of man as man. Now what becomes of science from the historicist point of view? Two possibilities. First, there is not science: there is either Western science, Chinese science, etc. These various sciences are radically different; they cannot be conceived of as more or less advanced forms of the same human pursuit called science. This view has been popularized by Spengler. Modern science is a part of modern culture, just as the techniques of the medicine man are a part of the culture of the Red Indian. One is as necessary and legitimate within its context as the other; each is meaningless without its context. The other possibility is this. There is science as a pursuit which is independent of particular cultures or neutral in regard to their differences; in the laboratory, it doesn't make any difference whether a man was reared in Europe or Africa or anywhere else. But science emerges through an abstraction from the things which are most vital to man, through

a conscious impoverishment. The living human being is necessarily a member of a specific civilization and thoroughly molded by it, but by becoming a scientist he is reduced to being an anonymous observer. This abstraction or reduction has a limited significance. [It is significant] only for the understanding of nonhuman things because it is based on the abstraction from everything specifically human, but it is incapable of giving any understanding or account of human things or of social phenomena in particular.

I do not know whether this position is sufficiently clear to you, and whether you recognize in it a clearer formulation of what you partially hear in different courses in the university. Do you see the fundamental problem: whether science is regarded as the highest perfection of human reason of which we know—leaving open the possibility that science can still make greater advances not only regarding results but regarding method as well—whether our science is demonstrably superior to what the medicine man does, to what the Greek mathematician did, to what the medieval physician did, and so on; or the other view, that this is a radically mistaken notion because the context to which science belongs, human life or a specific culture, is infinitely more important than what may be[4] common to these various civilizations. Do you see this? And do you see that there is a kind of necessity of going over from the ordinary positivistic view to something of this kind if one follows the logic of positivism?

Student: Is history of science a [. . .] science?

LS: Strictly speaking, no. Science in the original sense of the word, which is still preferred [by] positivism, cannot exist according to historicism because there cannot be a significant universal valid truth. Spengler's point. What does Spengler say about his own science? Why is it not universally valid? Only Faustian man can really understand that. A Greek could not have understood it, a Hindu cannot understand it—oh, he can take verbal cognizance of it, but he cannot understand it. There is a kind of objectivity within the political group. You must have heard this notion: historical objectivity. This was the goal of the historian of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Take Carl Becker or similar writers. For him there is no historical objectivity: every man is his own historian. [x] Of course this is not practical, for very obvious reasons, and so the more accepted view today is [that] there is an objectivity of the generation within the generation. So a reviewer of some historical work in some historical journal appeals to some kind of objectivity—otherwise he couldn't reasonably criticize it—but his argument would not have been valid to an earlier generation, nor will it be valid to later generations, so there is a kind of passing objectivity, whether limited to the generation, to the culture, or to the preference of the particular individual.

Student: But it seems to me there is still a difficulty, because to set up the objectivity of that generation requires some greater objectivity . . .

LS: I personally believe so, but let us first listen to the way in which the argument is established. Let me state it in a more limited form, in its more common form. Take Sabine's *History of*

[x] Carl Becker (1873-1945), American historian, author of *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932). Strauss alludes to "Everyman His Own Historian," the annual address of the president of the American Historical Association, delivered by Becker at Minneapolis, December 29, 1931. See *American Historical Review* 37 (1932): 221-36.

Political Theory.[xi] That is a very good example of this more common form of historicism. Now what does Sabine say? These men discussed in the book—Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, etc.—all believed they had discovered *the* political truth, that they had derived final knowledge of the fundamental principles of politics. And what does Sabine say in his very preface?[xii] He says that was a complete delusion: final knowledge, or the political truth, doesn't exist. What they did was merely to express the life of their times. I use this vague expression of Sabine's. This idea in Sabine is limited to metaphysics and moral things: they are historically relative, not science. Radical historicism includes science as well, for the reasons to which I have alluded.

Student: How does Sabine explain his own adherence to what he calls Hume's refutation of the principles of natural law?

LS: That's easy. That is the refutation of absolutism and is "absolutely valid." This is a necessity for all those positions: they must exempt a certain sphere from historical relativity. But I want to remind you first of some trivialities. Now if someone says all doctrines, all philosophies are historical, meaning that they belong to a certain historical situation—a decade, or even a period as long as the Middle Ages, the length of time doesn't matter—how is this statement established? The common answer is by historical evidence: We study the doctrines, we study the times, and then we see that they belong together. Now what does this historical evidence really prove? I would say: Absolutely nothing. Does anyone of you know what I mean by that? Let us take an example. [LS writes on the blackboard] Here we have Plato. We read Plato and we see that he has a view of what the just order of society is. Then we read John Locke and we see another view of what the right order of society is. What follows from that? What has this to do with the question of whether it is necessary and possible to find out the truth about the right order of society? What follows from this fact that Plato and Locke contradict each other, which they undoubtedly do? One could be right and the other wrong, and vice versa; they can both be wrong. But we can say with certainty that both cannot be right, because they contradict each other.

But the argument then goes on. If we look at Plato's doctrine, and Locke's, and many more—Hobbes, Machiavelli, Marsilius of Padua, and so on—we are bewildered. If that were a real science, there would be full agreement, as there is in other sciences. But in political philosophy there is an anarchy. This is an empirical fact, undeniable. And we infer from that that this anarchy is due to the fact that this problem is insoluble. But can we draw this inference? That no agreement has been reached among competent people regarding the sound principles of society, does this prove that this question is a meaningless question? What follows from this?

Student: There is a very good example in mathematics, that many problems went unsolved for thousands of years and then were solved. But mathematicians often work very hard to prove that a certain kind of problem has no proof; and then they prove that, and that is a tremendous advance.

LS: Yes. But this proof is a mathematical proof. It can never be historical. We are speaking now of what the historical evidence can prove.

[xi] George Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1937).
[xii] Sabine, *History*, v-vii (preface to the first edition).

Student: No, my point was that what is lacking here is the proof that there is no solution.

LS: Yes, but let us first follow the purely historical argument.

Student: [. . .]

LS: That is the conclusion which Sabine draws, and I think he states it very clearly in the preface. And to show you how seriously he means it, I shall mention his lecture on democracy given here at the University of Chicago. He made the factual statement to the effect that democracy is the best social order, and I asked him what the basis of that statement was. He replied that fundamentally he believed this way because he was raised as an American. This means that no knowledge is possible; you can only spell out the principles of your society.

The argument goes on as follows. There is this anarchy, and as good scientists, let us look at some other things to which these things may be related. In Plato we find a description of a small community which he calls a *polis*, and in the preface of Locke[’s *Second Treatise*] we find already 1689, and we know immediately that Locke supported the settlement of 1689, the Whig Settlement. And the Whig Settlement meant the Bank of England, and it is a very short step from the Bank of England to property as Locke understood it. It is as easy as that! Now we do the same thing with Hobbes, and we see: Well, the Stuarts and Cromwell, absolute monarchy and so on. I don’t have to [be]labor the points: All doctrines are functions of social situations.

What does this historical evidence prove? Granted for one moment that every doctrine is relative to a particular situation in the sense that we *know* that it could not have originated except in that situation, would this prove anything? Assuming that it is certain that Plato’s doctrine could not have emerged except [at] around 400 B.C. in Athens, what would this prove? Would this show the limited truth value of every doctrine? Why not?

Student: The situation may have been such that Plato had favorable circumstances which enabled him to see the truth.

LS: Exactly. In other words, even if it were proven that all doctrines are relative to historical situations, nothing would follow regarding the truth because there may be particular situations which are particularly favorable to realizing the truth, so that later generations could do no better but to sit at the feet of these men. That cannot be excluded by historical evidence in any way. Furthermore, the historical evidence shows at most that all doctrines that ever existed perish at a certain time. By “perish” I mean that they lost their hold on the general social mind, on the popular mind. It does not show that they deserved to perish, which is what the historicists contend—that is, that they perished because of their fundamental inadequacy. It could be shown that they deserved to perish because they were untrue *only* by criticism of the doctrines concerned. It would be necessary to take up Plato and show that what he says is unreasonable, and then you can perhaps explain Plato’s error by referring to the unfortunate circumstances in which he lived: for example, that he lived in a slave society and whatnot—although Plato abolishes slavery in the *Republic*. Still that would not be enough, a criticism of each doctrine by itself, because it is beyond human possibility, I believe. The only criticism of doctrines that

would be helpful would be a criticism of the *type* of doctrine, namely, we take the fundamental premise underlying all these doctrines, and this premise is that it is possible for a man to know the right or just order of society. Then we prove that this question can never be answered. If such a proof were given, everything else might follow but would be absolutely uninteresting for reasonable men, for if we know there is no reasonable solution,[xiii] why should we bother about these errors? We should turn to more fruitful inquiries. Does this not make sense?

Let me call this type of criticism by a term that is well-known: critique of pure reason. Just as Kant claimed to have shown the impossibility of any theoretical metaphysics by a critique of pure reason, one could imagine that another Kant would have stood up and proved, fundamentally in the Kantian way, that just as metaphysics is impossible as science, political philosophy is impossible as science, as universally valid knowledge. And then it would be settled. Of course, Sabine presupposes that Hume was the Kant of political philosophy,[xiv] which can very easily be refuted because Hume presented a doctrine regarding the right order of society in his *Treatise of Human Nature* and his ethics.[xv] So one would have to say that Hume didn't fully understand what his epistemology implied, but that is another matter.

Let us take another example to show you how this argument proceeds. The ordinary view that was accepted from Socrates until the French Revolution, and by some people even in the nineteenth century, is said to be refuted by history, which means primarily by historical observation. The older view, the philosophic view, was based on the premise that there is a pure mind, and that seems to imply that any doctrine is possible at any time. But if we analyze any doctrine, we see immediately that this was not possible at any time, that it had very specific historical presuppositions. For example, if you take a doctrine like that of Spinoza you can see that it presupposes Descartes, that it presupposes the practice of tolerance in the Dutch cities, that it presupposes democracy. Or take the situation today. How does it happen that we today, as a generation, have a greater interest in the classics than the preceding generation? Is this not due to the fact that there is a historical thing called the crisis of modernity brought on to the meanest capacity by the atom bomb? Does this not show that our predilections, our intellectual experimenting and so on are molded by the situation? Or take another example: Spengler's book on *The Decline of the West*.[xvi] When Spengler speaks of culture he thinks only of what he calls "high culture." When you in this College are required to read Ruth Benedict's book, *Patterns of Culture*,[xvii] a book which used Spengler, you see that when she speaks of culture she means any culture; the distinction between high and low culture is strictly speaking impossible for her. Conceivably she might use this distinction, but with what right [. . .] Now you have here a doctrine developed in Germany and transformed in America: What does this transformation show? A nondemocratic doctrine in nondemocratic Germany, a democratic transformation in

[xiii] In the transcript: "(reasonable solution?)"
[xiv] In the preface to his *History of Political Theory*, Sabine makes an "avowal" of the basis of his approach to political philosophy in his "general agreement with the results of Hume's criticism of natural law" (v); see also Sabine's account of Hume, 598-606.
[xv] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) and *An Enquiry into the Principles of Morals* (1751).
[xvi] Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1918). Published in English as *Decline of the West, or the Downfall of the Occident* in 1926.
[xvii] Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (1934).

democratic America. Does this not show how much people are determined in their thoughts by the historical situation?

Is the older view that underlies traditional political philosophy so crude as to say that every doctrine could have emerged equally well at any time? There is at the beginning of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* something which one could call a history of Greek philosophy.[xviii] Aristotle says there something very relevant to our subject. Could there be at the beginning, after some cataclysm that had destroyed all art, philosophy or science? Aristotle says: No, impossible, because philosophy or science presupposes a certain amount of leisure, the availability of certain more elementary arts, and so on.[xix] In the first place, philosophy or science, and therefore any doctrine, presupposes that certain presuppositions of scientific inquiry are fulfilled, which are by no means always fulfilled. Aristotle says, secondly, at the beginning of philosophy or science people are likely to suggest solutions which are very crude, because a certain training is required so that people can think of less crude solutions. Aristotle certainly would have said that his own doctrine would have been impossible at the beginning, but he would insist on this difference: he would say the conditions of human knowledge and of any doctrine are something fundamentally different from the sources of the doctrine. The conditions for the development of Plato's doctrine, for example, would be something like Athens, but this does not mean that the source of what Plato knew or believed he knew was Athens. And furthermore, they were fully aware of this fact: that different societies have different views of the whole. They called them myths. Every society is kept together by some notion of the whole which has authoritative force—that was the meaning of a myth—and therefore corresponding customs, manners, laws. Plato called all these social institutions the cave, and the caves are infinitely variable. There are essential limitations of variability, but for our purposes they are infinitely variable. Therefore the beginning of free and independent inquiry will always be at a different place and different times.

I wonder if I have succeeded in reminding you of this approach to political philosophy which, as I contend, is in the air and which determines in various degrees and in various ways most of the things said today about the subject.

Student: Wouldn't the historicists say, in reply to your distinction between the conditions of Plato's thought and Athens as a source of Plato's thought, that you are making a quibbling kind of distinction?

LS: It is not a quibbling distinction, but what they could say is that the distinction cannot be a refutation of historicism. And I didn't use it as that. I only said that the older notion of political philosophy or philosophy in general did make an allowance for historical varieties and for the fact that not all doctrines are equally possible at all times. In other words, I said that the older doctrine was not so crude as it is presented.

Student: I wonder if the difference between Aristotle's view on the conditions of philosophy and the historicist view is not expressed by Aristotle's distinction between necessary and sufficient conditions? Aristotle would say that there are certain necessary conditions without which you

[xviii] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 980a20-988a17.
[xix] *Metaphysics* 981b14-25.

cannot have such and such a view, and the historicist says that the conditions that prevail are the sufficient conditions.

LS: One could say that, but it would not be quite sufficient, because there is a kind of historicism which is not "necessitarian." I do not believe this would help very much.

Well, I would like . . .[xx] —really like to make sure that we understand each other about the theme of [. . .] Is this position which I called historicism—a name which is not very familiar in this country, but I prefer this term to "relativism," because relativism has certain connotations which are irrelevant in this context—is this position understood by you? The view that all human doctrines, including that of the sciences, are historical in this sense, that they belong to specific historical situations and therefore limit their claim to "truth."

Student: Suppose it is conceded that what Plato had to say about the right order of society is true, but that people living in a different historical situation reject that because truth depends on a certain set of circumstances and this set of circumstances no longer existed.

LS: One would have to clarify that. What does that mean? Does that mean that Plato was confronted with the "famous" decay of the *polis* and was worrying about how he could prevent that, and thought of a way of saving it in the *Republic*? Is this what you mean?

Student: No. Let us say that because the circumstances of the time were such that Plato was enabled to reach the truth—

LS: Which truth?

Student: Well, the truth under all circumstances.

LS: All right. Plato says: This is the truth, universally valid. He speaks not only about Greeks but about men. And he says that if men want to order their affairs reasonably well, they have to order them along the lines of the *Republic* or the *Laws*. Now the historicist knows that this is wrong. But we must say that this is not mere nonsense, and that given these and these limitations, it is perfectly possible that a great mind could arrive at [. . .] solutions. And then of course we could say: Very well, and let us turn to Plato [. . .] and see if we can't do something better to get a doctrine that really fulfils that. Either it is admitted that the doctrine, even if not available now, is [. . .] possible, that's all right; or it is said that these historical experiences prove that the question is falsely put, and one must never[5] [raise] the question of *the* right order but only the right order for us here—to which Plato would easily answer that it is impossible to raise the question of the right order here and now without raising the question of the right order simply.

But I recognize in what you say a fragment of what I call historicism. I believe the clearest statement of that position in the English language is probably Collingwood's *Idea of History*.[xxi] It is very far from being clear, but it is the clearest. And Carl Becker, whom I haven't read so well, but I found a quotation in a note in Sabine. I can only paraphrase it: Every human mind, even the

[xx] There is a break in the tape at this point.
[xxi] R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946).

greatest minds, is determined in fundamental thought by premises of[6] [its] society, of which premises it is unaware.[xxii] This is only another aspect of the same thing. You see, if you are aware of a premise as a questionable premise, you are already free from it. So you can be limited by unevident presuppositions only if you do not know of them. In other words, the historicist view would state it as follows: Man is surrounded always by historically variable premises like walls. Man can never live in the sun, to use Plato's term; he lives only and always in a cave. But I think this view is impossible, because if I know the walls, I am beyond them. So the historicist view, if properly formulated, would be that man is surrounded by invisible walls.

Student: Then our cross-cultural research scheme comes out.[xxiii]

LS: Why?

Student: Because we are outside of our cultural walls.

LS: Yes, but in your inquiry, you are historically conditioned. You enlarge your factual knowledge but you do not alter your categorical apparatus. That's the implication. What you say would already presuppose a criticism of the historicist principle.

Student: These walls exist because we know of them.[xxiv]

LS: That's the question! Very well, but I can only say that it is a kind of inference from what has happened in the past. People assume they know that Plato based his thought on certain premises, the questionable character of which he was unaware of; that Descartes had certain premises, the questionable character of which he was unaware of, and all others. If this is so, if that is proven, is it not then a reasonable, commonsensical proposition to say what is true of these great men is likely to be true of us poor people and of human beings in general? It is for this reason that I prefer the term "historicism," because it reminds us of the kind of evidence that is ultimately presupposed . . . every meaning is part of a system of meaning. You must have heard this assertion. These systems of meaning are the "catches";[xxv] and therefore a transposition from one system into the other is impossible, because there is no way [. . .] Well, Spengler is by no means the most radical representative. These people must always make one assumption: whereas the older thinkers believed that man could stand outside the historical stream, the historical flux, the historicist proper says man can never do that. So how then is any overall view with finality as Spengler presented it possible? They answered that there is an absolute point in the flux, an absolute moment. But then the question becomes: How can you prove that this moment is the absolute moment?

Student: In other words, Spengler's attempt to escape from the historical bounds of his own culture by his use of the absolute moment is essential to historicism?

LS: Well, fundamentally it is a crude version of Hegel.

[xxii] We have been unable to identify this quotation from Becker in Sabine's *History*.
[xxiii] In the transcript: "comes out (?)"
[xxiv] The transcriber notes: "This may or may not be what was said."
[xxv] In the transcript: "'catches'(?)"

Student: Did I understand you to say that as soon as one is aware of the existence of these walls, he has transcended them? If he is aware of one of these premises, he is free of it?

LS: Fundamentally, yes.

Student: I wonder then whether the assumption of the eternity of the visible universe is a premise for Aristotle?

LS: No, and I don't believe he can prove it. It is revealing perhaps of his premise, but it is not a premise.[xxvi] The principle of contradiction is a premise for Aristotle. And you know what people say today about the principle of contradiction—new logic, and not only symbolic but also the logic connected with Hegel.

Let us now make some critical remarks. If we take the historicist position, as we ought to, in its full extent, which is that all human thought is historical—and this means that it has perished deservedly or that it will perish deservedly—this would include the historicist thesis itself. Now some people say: Yes, that is true of all human thought except this thesis. By some miracle man can grasp that all human thought is historical and know that this is eternally true, but everything else is not eternally true. That is of course nonsense: not only the thesis itself but at least the argument supporting it would have to have the same status. They then modify the position to read: All significant human thought is historical; nonhistorical human thought is fundamentally insignificant. In other words, by knowing that all human thought is historical, I know absolutely nothing as to how I should live or as to what the truth is. I know only something negative. Let me take an example. There is a movement in Europe gradually reaching the western shores of the Atlantic, called existentialism, which is only a modified version of historicism, nothing else. The thesis of existentialism was stated by someone as follows: There is no objective certainty, only subjective certainty. Subjective certainty is the certainty that I have by virtue of a fateful dispensation which I accept.

Now look at this proposition that there is no objective certainty. That needs some proof, doesn't it? You need some argument to establish that, and this would be admitted. They would admit that there *is* a kind of objective certainty as to the fact that there is no objective certainty. But they would say that that won't help you any: what is needed is substantive certainty. This is related to the question of Sabine and Hume already alluded to. Hume's argument, to the extent that it is relevant here, would have the character of merely negative reasoning, destructive of the possibility of political philosophy and valid for all the future as such. But it would tell us nothing about the right order. That has to be found elsewhere. Where can we find it? Assuming now that we have some proof that the question of the right order is not capable of being answered in a universally valid manner and valid for man as man, where can we find it? Because we need some distinction between good and bad; we need it merely to find our way in our society, to say nothing of acting. Where do we get that orientation? And what would the historicist's answer be? By acceptance, by accepting the orientation that fate has bestowed on us. Now this does not necessarily mean the values of your society, because your personal fate may impose something

[xxvi] In the transcript: "premise (?)"

on you that differs from the values of your society. But ultimately you have to accept certain premises that are unevident in themselves but have subjective certainty for you.

Nietzsche has stated this view very sharply as follows: that if one analyzes any doctrine, one arrives ultimately at one or two propositions which are unevident to us but which were fully evident, subjectively evident, to the originator of the doctrine. And he illustrated this by a word from a medieval mystery play in which an ass appears. One character in the play says: "Enter ass beautiful and strong."[xxvii] That is the speaker's fundamental prejudice, but he doesn't know that it is a prejudice. Nietzsche called it an ass because the sound an ass makes is in German called "*ja*," which is of course also the German word for "yes"; namely, a fundamental "yes" is underlying all doctrines, and this fundamental "yes" is as stupid as the sound made by an ass. Something of this kind has of course to be said.

Let me refer to the most recent example of this problem. It is an essay written by a very intelligent and knowledgeable person: "Plato saw something which the earlier philosophers did not see, but there is also something that Plato did not see, for no one can see everything. The modern thinkers saw something that Plato did not see, but something escapes them too. Even those who realize the radically historical character of their own existence and the fact that they cannot transcend their own horizon, even they do not see everything."[xxviii] All human knowledge is limited, even the knowledge of the historicist. But I was absolutely surprised that he did not see one crucial implication: In the case of Plato and others he alluded to the specific prejudice: he says their main contention is inadequate or has proved to be inadequate. But in the case of historicism he says that while the present-day thinkers do not know everything, he exempts them, this main thesis, from all future revision. This is a final and absolute truth. Whereas in the earlier cases, that which escaped the thinkers reduces their fundamental contention to untruth, our basic assumption, the historicist assumption is irrefutable for all time, the implication being in one way or another that we are in an absolute situation: we don't see everything—of course not—but the most fundamental thing we see now, and that is final. This is, I believe, another illustration of the problem.

I think the difficulty of historicism appears only if we take our starting point from this premise: that it is impossible to assert that all human thought is historical without admitting that there is a certain dimension which is exempt from the historical flux. Otherwise this thesis itself becomes swallowed up in historical relativity. And now the more radical historicists start with questioning that point in other language: Can there be a sphere in which we prove the historical relativity of all knowledge, and all the corollaries and implication thereof, which is exempt from the historical flux? Or is this notion of a sphere exempt from the process impossible?

Now Kant spoke of critical philosophy. In the ordinary forms of historicism there is an indication that there is genuine knowledge, but of a purely negative character. The things that man needs to know in order to live well he cannot know; what he can know is his ignorance and the peculiar character of his ignorance. Not only can he not know the whole truth, but this inability to know the whole truth is due to history. The thesis that man does not know the whole truth is old. What

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[xxvii] "*Adventavit asinus, / Pulcher et fortissimus*." *BGE*, part 1, aphorism 8. Kaufmann translates in a footnote: "The ass arrived, beautiful and most brave."

[xxviii] We have been unable to identify the author of the statement.

we are concerned with here is the contention that this limitation has the character of an historical limitation. I would like to say a few words about this last point. The historicist assertion amounts then, in a way, to an old assertion, namely, that the truth, the important truth, is elusive. Man can never grasp it fully. This in itself is nothing but a restatement of what philosophers, or the most important philosophers, always said. Historicism in a way restates this Platonic assertion, but it suggests a specific interpretation of the Platonic insight, namely, that this elusiveness of truth is essentially connected with history. The question concerns then not so much the general assertion that the truth is elusive, but the connection of that elusiveness with history. How is this established? Fundamentally the historicist assumption amounts to this: We know that we make certain dogmatic assumptions, but we are unable to identify them. Again, I refer to Nietzsche, who was perhaps the greatest exponent of this position: We cannot know the best in us. This does not refer only to psychology of the individuals; it has a much more radical meaning: "the best in us" means that which enables us to live as human beings. That which has this character cannot be known to us, because if it were known we would question it. But we know nevertheless that there is such a hidden unevident premise. How can one think on that basis?

Let us look for one moment [at] how Nietzsche tried to think on that basis. Nietzsche started from the premise that all thought is based on premises of a hypothetical character, or all thought is thought from a peculiar perspective which as such is in no way superior to any other perspective. So he presented his findings as no more than findings in a certain perspective. He could not leave it at that for the very obvious reason that if he did, one thing would be as good as any other. How did he get out of this? How did he defend his perspective against other perspectives? Fundamentally, he argued as follows: All known alternative perspectives or hypotheses are refuted. The only one to which he saw no possible objection was his own. He implied that the time will come when this now-irrefutable doctrine will prove inadequate.

Now one has to say what this gentleman said about cross-cultural research: that granted that we know the dogmatic character of all assumptions but we do not know what our dogmatic assumption is—granted that this is so, and to a certain extent I believe it is true, what would be the natural consequences of that? Or, for example, I have the suspicion that I make certain unevident assumptions because I have seen that happen to the greatest men. What would be the conclusion from that? Would this not be a function of historical studies, to help us to clarify our own premises? If truth is elusive because of the historical character of human thought, then it would seem that we would have to study other human thought in order to disinter our own premises and then subject them to criticism. This is excluded by the historicist premise because that presupposes the possibility of historical objectivity, namely, that we are able to understand other cultures, other human thinkers. But if all human thought is historical, historical understanding in particular will suffer from the same limitation. Each generation interprets the past in its [own] way. We cannot understand thinkers of other times as they understood themselves, because our perspective necessarily differs from theirs. But a great difficulty arises. Let us assume that it is true that we cannot understand the earlier thinkers as they understood themselves. How can we then ever establish the historicist premise? Does this not imply that something escaped the earlier thinkers? How can I prove that, if I can never understand them? I can only say that what I understand of Plato or Hobbes, my image of Plato or my image of

Hobbes, *these images*[xxix] did not grasp something. One cannot say that they themselves failed to grasp something.

They say that something of fundamental importance escaped the earlier thinkers. On the other hand, they say that it is impossible to understand the earlier thinkers as they understood themselves. These two statements seem to be contradictory: How is it possible to criticize the earlier thinkers if we do not understand them? But historicism presupposes both that we can criticize them—it is based on such criticism—and on the other hand it denies the very premise of such criticism, which is that we can understand them as they understood themselves. Historicism is in need of historical objectivity in order to establish its thesis, and it must deny the possibility of historical objectivity.

Student: [. . .]

LS: If you look at the human situation, what do you see?

Student: I am not sure that it is sensible to say that they can base their doctrine on a direct apprehension of the human situation . . .

LS: Well, that may be asserted, and it would make it easier, but I would say in fact that the historicist position in all cases is based on some general impression derived from history in the course of the nineteenth century. Now this general impression was called the so-called "historical sense." It was the great pride of Germany in the nineteenth century, and it conquered most of the Western world in various degrees of delusion or dilution.[xxx] This meant that all human ideas, anything for which man had sacrificed himself and which were cherished more highly than life, perished necessarily. What was true of the ideas of the Middle Ages, etc., will inevitably be true of our own ideas as well. The general attitude during the nineteenth century was one of complacency: somehow the hope that out of the perishing of our own ideas some still more beautiful ideas would emerge. In other words, the notion of progress was still powerful then. *Historicism proper comes into being only if progress is denied*. Then that which replaces the ideas you cherish will not be still more beautiful, but will be merely different, and[7] may conceivably be its sad denial.[xxxi]

Student: [Something about the possibility of an historical moment in which the "walls are laid bare"][xxxii]

LS: But is this not accompanied . . . I mean, the historical sense is not constituted by the number of the historical facts known. This alleged awareness that there is such a thing as the time, the spirit of the time, or whatever you might call it, is the essence of it because in that everything is implied. Because then for a critical analysis, the question . . . and you can never establish that by an analysis of your own time only. Twentieth-century man may be just crazy; and in former times this did not exist, so you have to turn to former times. But as a matter of fact, everyone

[xxix] Emphasis added.
[xxx] In the transcript: "(delusion or dilution)."
[xxxi] In the transcript: "(sad denial?)"
[xxxii] As noted by the transcriber.

who spoke about these things with a reasonable degree of explicitness possessed a considerable amount of historical information on which he drew. Without some historical knowledge, alleged or real, the whole position would be impossible.

Student: [. . .]

LS: Perhaps some of them don't like that, but I think it is necessarily implied. One could perhaps say this. Historicism in the form in which it exists today, which is divorced from any belief in progress, is a transformation of that complacency, that hopeful belief in the historical process which was the belief in progress. The problem is created only by this fact: in the historicist assertion there is something involved which we cannot dismiss.[xxxiii] I believe it has very little to do with history, but it has very much to do with this awareness of the elusiveness of truth. I believe the success (of historicism)[xxxiv] comes from the fact that the history of philosophy presented itself to them, and still presents itself superficially today, as a sequence of dogmatisms which all claim to have revealed the full truth finally. And the courage to believe in the possibility of the full truth[xxxv] today is very small; and historicism is in a way a questionable exposition of this fact. But the fundamental point involved, a point that can be stated without any reference whatever to history—historicism,[xxxvi] is to say that the truth is elusive.

The problem is to see how the two assertions—that the truth is elusive, and the truth is historical—became combined. How could this happen? One must study Nietzsche to see that, as follows. What do we mean by the truth? We mean primarily the most important theme of human thought . . . Now Hegel said the substance—but that is the same thing—is the Mind. Nietzsche says the substance is the soul: in itself an old story, but he understood the soul differently than the old thinkers. Why? Fundamentally on the basis of evolutionism: there was an early man with a very thin soul, and the soul developed—this is found in the *Genealogy of Morals*—it acquired a greater width and depth. [8][The soul] acquired it, and there was no necessity whatever for this acquisition. It just happened. If the soul is the substance and therefore the major theme of all human reflection, then the truth is elusive fundamentally because the soul itself changes. Not only the subject but the object of human knowledge changes as well. Something of this kind is the link between the two assertions. Evolutionism is only a kind of prolongation of the historical variability.

I will make a concluding remark about the historicist problem and then we can turn to a more positive discussion.

[xxxiii] In the transcript: "(dismiss?)."
[xxxiv] Parentheses appear in the transcript.
[xxxv] In the transcript: "(the full truth?)."
[xxxvi] In the transcript: "(history—historicism?)"

[1] Deleted “a.”
[2] Deleted “this.”
[3] Deleted “make.”
[4] Deleted “in.”
[5] Deleted “weight.”
[6] Deleted “their.”
[7] Deleted “which.”
[8] Deleted “It.”

Session 6: January 20, 1954
More on Historicism

Leo Strauss: [In progress] —in various stages of your previous training. But regarding historicism, you also have been indoctrinated with it, but without sufficient clarity because of the fact[i] that this is not a specific position. I look for another illustration and find it in a statement by Mr. Sabine, the Nestor[ii] of the history of political thought in this country. No, Nestor is of course a term of praise . . . it means a man venerable by age and eloquence. Now he says, quoting Carl Becker, that all thought depends on the "'climate of opinion' of an age" in which it is thought. In that climate of opinion "there are presumptions implicit" which "no contemporary ever fully grasps, precisely because they[iii] are so deeply ingrained in the texture of his thinking."[iv] Now that is only another way of saying what I called last time the invisible wall. There are always limiting premises, but differing from historical situation to historical situation. But they can never be known to the people concerned; if they could be known to them, they would no longer limit them.

These presuppositions are not generally valid and they concern the fundamental orientation: they are not just particular premises regarding particular subject matters, but the whole orientation . . . That means, as the phrase goes, that all human thought is historically relative. And this has one particular implication, namely, that all historical understanding is historically relative. We read Shakespeare today very differently from the way Dr. Johnson read Shakespeare in the eighteenth century and Ben Johnson read him in the seventeenth century, and other people will read him in the twenty-first century. And each interpretation is in principle as valid and defensible, and even necessary for the people concerned as the other.

Now I would like to explain to you the difficulty as follows. The historicist insight is meant to be final. In other words, the fact that all human thought is historically relative is meant to be with us to stay; it is not assumed that thirty years from now we shall see that this was a delusion. It is meant to be final. And it is also meant to be a novel insight, something which emerged only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which means that we know something of utmost importance which escaped all earlier thinkers. Now, how can this be? How can this be, that we have such a final and fundamental insight of which we know with certainty that it will never be shaken? There is only one clear way to assert that, and that is to say that we live in an absolute moment. In a way, the end of history has come. People will still have wars and revolutions, and books will be written in infinite numbers, but this is in a fundamental sense irrelevant because the most important insight regarding the whole which men can possibly have has been gained. In

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[i] In the transcript: "(because of the fact)."
[ii] See session 3, n. xv.
[iii] That is, "these premises."
[iv] Strauss refers to George Sabine, author of *A History of Political Theory* (1937), and apparently cites and paraphrases from Sabine's review of Strauss's *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. Strauss cites from the same Sabine passage (among others from the same review) in his own article, "On a Forgotten Kind of Writing," originally published in early 1954 and reprinted in *What is Political Philosophy?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 227.

that sense the end of history is come. That was the assertion of Hegel, and all these positions are modifications of Hegel's position.

But historicism proper, as distinguished from Hegel, asserts that there is no absolute moment, and there cannot be an absolute moment: the historical process is unfinished and unfinishable. Now that means of course that something of utmost importance escapes us too, precisely because there is no absolute moment. But the question arises, if that is so, if our position, our whole view is not in itself radically superior to the older views: Could there not be older views superior to ours? To which the following answer must be given by the historicist: No, we understand the earlier thought enough to see that they were blind regarding the historicity of thought, and we obviously are not blind to it. But that is not so easy, because on the premise of historicism our understanding of the past, our historical understanding, is also limited by and relative to our situation. So we cannot really understand the thought of the past as it had been but necessarily as it appears to us from our premises. How then can we say that something escaped the thinkers of the past if we can never know their thought as it really was? Or the other way around: beyond the obvious knowledge we have of the external facts, it is an inevitable consequence of the historicist assertion that something in earlier thought of great importance is inaccessible to us. Now if that is so, one must raise the question: Could not that part of the thought of the past which escapes us invalidate our basic insight, so that it is perfectly possible that this thing now invisible may become visible fifty years from now and therefore invalidate the whole position as it has developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?

Let me state this difficulty in the form of two propositions:

1. Something of fundamental importance escaped the earlier thinkers.
2. It is impossible to understand the earlier thinkers as they understood themselves.

Both are necessary propositions for this view. Now there is a contradiction, for this reason. How can we say that something of fundamental importance escaped these thinkers if it is not possible to understand them adequately? In other words, historicism must admit the possibility of historical objectivity, to use this term by which I mean the legitimacy of the attempt to try [to] understand[v] earlier thought as it understood itself. It must admit the possibility of historical objectivity in order to establish its own thesis. And yet it is forced to deny the possibility of historical objectivity, because otherwise it would be possible to transcend one's historical horizon radically.

I would like to say a few words about the alleged impossibility of historical objectivity. Take one example. When Voltaire read Homer, he saw of course that he was a great poet, but he said that he was not as good a poet as certain poets of the seventeenth century. Why? Because Homer is indecent. Now Voltaire of course was in his own way also indecent, but Voltaire never used an expression which could not be used in the presence of a duchess, whereas Homer used lots of expressions which could not be used in the presence of a duchess. So there was a certain lack of [. . .] something which showed that he was not civilized enough. That was Voltaire's position. Now some people say, "We think entirely differently." What does that mean? Are we not entitled to say that Voltaire made a foolish judgment? Would not similar considerations apply to

[v] In the transcript: "(understand?)"

differences of criticisms of Shakespeare from the time of Ben Johnson up to whoever now is regarded as the leading Shakespeare critic?

But what is the general proof of the impossibility of historical objectivity? The usual answer is this. When we study historical phenomena, we address a certain question to it, say, to the Roman electoral system, or to the economic system of old China, or what have you—or to a certain doctrine, too. Now this question which the historian addresses to his subject matter is fundamentally different from the question which animated the historical actor. For example, the people who caused the civil strife in Rome did not have the concern of the historian. This should be clear to everyone. In the first place, they were not interested in *understanding* their situation historically, but they just had certain practical issues to fight out. And even the Roman historian who described it is not likely to have had the same question which the present historian has. Or if we study a doctrine, say, Locke's, the question we raise is in one way fundamentally different from the question Locke raises under all conditions, because Locke took for granted that what he is teaching is the truth. We, precisely if we are careful and also do not reject Locke offhand, would simply say: We do not know whether Locke is right. That means already an enormous difference of the perspective of the historian as distinguished from the perspective of the object or subject matter of the historian. If that is so, if the perspective of the historian is essentially different from the perspective of the historical actor—including thinkers, of course—then historical objectivity is impossible because the perspective of the historian naturally changes. An historian in his country in 1952 has clearly an entirely different perspective from the historian in Austria in, say, 1870. And so on.

But is this the whole story, admitting that that is a part? Let me take an example. I want to know something about the economic history of classical antiquity, a subject which was of no interest whatever to historians until the nineteenth century. There were some fools who collected all kinds of information about the post, about coins, about ornaments and whatnot, and they might of course also have paid some attention to the way people earned their livelihood. But serious historians were not concerned with that; they were concerned with the political transactions and other things of this kind. So that is doubtless a specific historical perspective, that of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when economic problems were so much in the foreground, which produced a discipline hitherto unknown called economic history. So by studying, say, an ancient historian in order to use him for the purpose of writing an economic history of [1]antiquity, I approach him with a question which was alien to his mind. But how do I proceed? I have my question, which has nothing to do with any ancient author: the question of economic history. And I have also the question which leads me to this particular writer, say, Herodotus: I am going to study him because I want to find out something about economic history—which has nothing to do with Herodotus's interest. But what do I do then? Well, I can of course just skim his pages to see whether there are any references to money, or to grain, or to meat or whatnot, but then I would be a very poor historian. Why? Because the most important information might escape me. I might find information very relevant to economic matters in unexpected places, so I have to study the whole book carefully. But how do I do that? To do this I must understand Herodotus's history as Herodotus meant it to be understood. And from this moment, my question, economic question, is absolutely subordinate to the question of Herodotus, and I sit as it were at his feet and try to learn from him. Why is this necessary? Because assuming that Herodotus is practically silent about what we call economics, that may be due to the fact that economic factors were not

as important in his time as in ours. Maybe he was right, and maybe we learn something about economic history in general and its relative importance from the silence of Herodotus. All these things I cannot exclude. To repeat: the moment I turn to any sources—they do not have to be doctrines; they can also be chronicles or other materials of this kind—at that moment I have to subordinate my own question due to my historical perspective to the question raised by the historical actors or thinkers concerned. Otherwise we shall never reach any understanding of the past. How is it possible to understand Herodotus exactly as he understood himself? I don't say it is simple, or that anyone ever *in fact* understood Herodotus as he understood himself. There are certain difficulties. But to understand him as he understood himself is the ultimate goal of historians, and the difficulties in no way invalidate this as the goal of historians.

And how is it possible? Only because there is an ultimate identity of the perspectives of all human beings: not in the particular limitation or formulation of their question, but in that at which they are ultimately aiming. For example, all human beings are concerned with the good, by which I do not now mean the morally good in particular, but all are concerned with something they call a good life for themselves, and in many cases for other human beings or for society itself. What is behind even the most atrocious taboo of the most savage tribe? Why was it established, if not because the tribe thought it is good? Without an assumption of the fundamental identity of human beings, no understanding of the past nor of understanding in general is possible.

To repeat, to put it very cautiously: the historicist propositions[vi] are so problematic that it is not reasonable to take them for granted. If I succeed in convincing you only of this, that natural right is a problem and not just something that we know with certainty is a delusion, I would regard myself as fortunate. But of course I believe that these historicist positions[vii] are really untenable, but I would be satisfied if you would realize that there is something very problematic about them.

Student: [. . .]

LS: The assumption I make is a consequence of a reflection on what it means to be a human being. It is not sufficient to say a human being is a vertebrate or a mammal which uses verbal symbols, because you are forced to wonder why that particular beast can use verbal symbols, whereas monkeys and parrots cannot. So you are driven back to something which was formerly called reason; but if that word is not good, try to think of a better one. Of course I think it is also confirmed by experience,[2] not[3] [only] by the experience of the historian but by our ordinary experience, when we observe human beings, when we talk with them, what we presuppose in all conversations with them—reason[viii]—and which is never really refuted by any other experience, not even by insane people.

Mr. Romoser: . . . refuting historicist argument doesn't necessarily prove that Plato was right?

[vi] In the transcript: "(propositions)"
[vii] In the transcript: "(historicist positions)"
[viii] In the transcript: "(reason)"

LS: God forbid. In the first place, I would have to know what Plato taught, and that is not so easy. But assuming we knew that, that would of course need a proof, because Plato does not really prove what he says. Socrates uses some persuasive arguments which reduce to silence certain other people or which persuade them, but this is no proof. So we have to reconstruct Plato's serious arguments, and then we could see whether they are valid or not. Under some conditions, one can argue that way: If I know there are only two possibilities, A and B, and A is nonsense and B is Plato, [then] by refuting A, I have proved Plato. But how can you do that in this case when there are an infinite variety of people who take issue with Plato?

Student: [A question] dealing with the differences between a simple and complex society, and whether the complex society does not add some elements which were not present in the simple society.[ix]

LS: Yes, but there is something fundamentally common. But when the quest for the good becomes a conscious quest not guided by tradition as tradition, that is an unbelievably fundamental change. And still there is something in common, because when they formerly thought that the way to establish the good was merely to repeat in deed and speech what the fathers and fathers' fathers did and said, now people say that is not the way to find the good. But it is still the same question.

Mr. Romoser: Yes, but there is a new element . . .

LS: No doubt, no doubt about that . . .

Mr. Romoser: Is it a true characteristic of all historicists and positivists that they are not conscious of the fact that the tools they use are culturally limited? Are not some of them conscious of that fact?

LS: Yes, the historicists would say that. He is proud to admit that. And even some people who would regard themselves as just a little bit more sophisticated positivists would admit that. But the question is: How do they understand that? What conclusion do they draw from that? You see, the mere variety of opinion which exists in the contemporary American academic scene forces one who wants to get some clarity to make some distinction between clear positions. That there is a kind of unfairness involved is obvious; some people would protest to be called[4] [this] or that, but the question is, of course, with what right? For example, if someone says, "I know my premises are culture-bound," the mere verbal pronouncement is of no use. I want to see what he is doing with that. Does he draw from this the conclusion that only people sharing the same cultural premises can understand what he says? What does he do with physics, then? In the case of theoretical physics, we know that it is not in this way culture-bound because we know that people coming from all cultures, provided they have the necessary native equipment, can become fully competent in this field. There is no difference between a Japanese physics and a Norwegian physics. But if there should be a fundamental difference between Chinese social science and Norwegian social science, if that is the implication, then I wonder where this thing stops. Suppose a Norwegian and a Chinese are writing a study of mercantilism: Is there no possibility of a reasonable discussion between the two men to determine which interpretation is sound or

[ix] As noted by the transcriber.

unsound? Is it not then possible to transcend the cultural limitation? Or does the cultural limitation merely mean this, that if someone writes a book on mercantilism in China—and perhaps Chinese students know less of mercantilism than someone in central Europe would—must he not use a number of illustrations from Chinese practice in order to make clear to them[x] what he means, which his opposite number in Germany would not have to do? That belongs to mere rhetoric and to the mere pedagogic element of the thing and not to the substantive argument. In other words, the mere assertion, "I believe that, period," is not enough. You must see what it means in the context of that whole inquiry. If this culture-bound business is taken serious[ly], then it would lead to the consequence that there is no possibility of understanding between a Western social scientist and a Chinese social scientist. I know people who would say that, but I also know that I have never seen such a person in an American social science department up to now. There of course may be such a person. It is so easy glibly to say, "Of course I know," and not to draw the inference and to spell out precisely what you mean by that.

Mr. Romoser: Cannot one say: I know these, say, economic relations exist in China and in Norway, but since this particular culture in which I am interested in . . . [xi]

LS: You fail to make a distinction. Of course, between a person who is deeply immersed in a culture and other persons there is a deep gulf, and he would find it difficult to understand them. But we are talking about science, and we imply that scientists live in a medium which transcends the cultural limitations. That is the original notion of science and still accepted by positivism. Now of course you can say this is naive. And even in the most abstruse and refined part of mathematics or theoretical physics, you will still recognize that culture. Then what happens to the idea of science? Spengler drew the ultimate conclusion from this, that there is no possibility of theoretical physics or mathematics common to man as man; the Chinese or other non-Western people who learn it will have ceased to be Chinese but will have been assimilated by Western thought. They will not have transcended their historical limitations and have come to a medium which is common to man as man, but they have transcended merely the Eastern world and become Westerners. But these same social scientists, in this country at least, would object to that. They are very much concerned that Western science is not a Western imperialistic affair as it would appear, but is really a medium in which men as men can understand each other. That of course is a fine line which separates positivism in any shape from historicism in any shape. The moment that the idea of science or philosophy is denied because of culture-boundness, then you accept the historicist position as distinguished from the positivist position. I believe that this is the clearest distinction I can think of, and I believe it is a very important distinction. It is not just a negligible incidental affair.

Student: [. . .]

LS: In other words, taking an intelligent person antedating all historicism, how can you prove it to him? I don't know. You see, we drifted into something in the nineteenth century, and a really independent argument is hardly ever found. Now in former times, people argued as follows. If you travel from one country to another, you see they are different: the obvious difference of language, and the equally obvious one of customs and manners, of governmental systems; and

[x] In the transcript: "them (Chinese students?)"
[xi] In the transcript: "(something or other)"

also of stories which people tell of the origin of all things. Now that was the way Herodotus made his anthropology, as you call it. He looked around everywhere and asked: What language do they speak? What customs, manners, and laws do they have? What stories do they tell? And last but not least, what arts do they cultivate? Now by describing a given group united by all these things and distinguished by them from their neighbors, you can say this is a unit which is not simply a political unit, because it is also distinguished from others by nonpolitical things, like language, like manners, like doctrines.

I take another aspect of the same thing. The words "culture" and "civilization" were until a short time ago used only in the singular. Civilization meant that process by virtue of which men become civilized beings, and there is of course only one. Some nations are civilized, meaning? They don't run around naked, they have government; and if someone commits a murder he is executed for it, and other very crude but not unimportant things. The Chinese are civilized, the Hindus are civilized, the Western people are civilized, and so on. And culture, too: culture means culture of the human mind; and there is of course only one way of culturing it, because if you give it a wrong direction, if you fill it with prejudices and superstition, you cannot call that culture but only corruption. There was only one civilization and one culture. Then—I don't really know when, but someone who is interested can do us a favor and look in the Oxford dictionary to find when the plural first came into the language—the words "civilization" and "culture" began to be used in the plural. I would be reasonably sure that this occurred only late in the nineteenth century. Someone once told me that Gibbon did it, but I am reasonably sure that he did not, but I have not gone over every line of Gibbon.[xii]

So what does that mean? That means that people saw that there is a variety of manners and stories and languages. But this was elementary; people always knew this. What was the new thing? It was that good and bad regarding which it was always thought by the large majority of thinking men that they were always the same—of course, not the details. For example, that celibacy is good was not assumed to be evident, but divine revelation could assure men that celibacy is good. That is another story. But in the realm of human reason, celibacy is regarded with indifference. Of course, if it were practiced universally it would be bad, but if practiced by individuals it may be good. But the principle of good and bad was thought to be the same, however differently philosophers might interpret it, but the substance was the same. In the nineteenth century, a different view prevailed: No, it is not the same, mankind is distinguished from each other not only by manners, customs, laws, languages, but even by the very principle of good and bad, and distinguished in such a way that any of these different understandings of good and bad is in principle as defensible as any other. Then from that moment on civilization, making [a] human being a good human being—which is what it originally meant, of course—had to become a plural, because there was a plurality of ways in which a good man was understood. And we are the heirs of that.

Now the empirical proof would be this. The difference of language, customs, and manners is elementary and irrelevant.[xiii] The Chinese gentleman is defined in these terms, the Greek gentleman in these terms, and the French gentleman of the eighteenth century in these—and they

[xii] In the transcript: "(My two-volume Oxford is no help here. W.B.)." "W.B." might be Strauss's student Walter Burns.)

[xiii] In the transcript, this sentence is in parentheses.

are always different. [LS writes on the blackboard] That proves it! No, it does not. The implication of this argument is that it is impossible to raise the question: Which of these various and contradictory understandings of the perfect gentleman is the best one? Maybe none of them is perfectly good, because each has some elements [of what is good], and the wise thing would be to combine them in one complete understanding. But this is excluded by the historicists.

Student: Why do they exclude the possibility of raising this question?

LS: That is the very long story of the genesis of this whole approach, and I will discuss it later on. But today I want merely to point out that the historicist argument of today is the result of a very long development in which that which you now question is taken for granted. People try to live with that; and it became interesting—it became so great only in the moment in which this questioning of the unity of human thought was transferred from morality to thought or science in general. Then you are confronted with this radical historicism which today plays a considerable role, more in Europe than in this country, but in various subterraneous ways affecting the thought of this country as well. One of the channels by which these ideas reached academic social science was the sociology of knowledge.

Student: Where does Burckhardt stand in this manner?

LS: Burckhardt was not really a philosophic man; he was an historian in a way overwhelmed by Hegel but who finally believed Hegel's idea was impossible. So his work, Reflections on World History, is a kind of criticism of Hegel,[xiv] and he attacks Hegel at the decisive point by saying [that] man was complete at a very early date. In other words, in Homer you have already the complete human morality,[xv] and no legitimate change from that has ever occurred. True, Burckhardt never thought his position through fully. We will discuss in this class a position which is comparable in this uncertainty or confusion to Burckhardt, and that is Tocqueville. They had something in common: they were both conservative men who had the feeling that freedom is in very great danger. Tocqueville thought it could be preserved if democracy is wise; Burckhardt was very skeptical and thought that democracy would lead to terrible dictatorship of the sort with which we have become familiar. From this perspective they looked back, both never fully clarifying this fundamental problem of the relation between history and principle. Tocqueville said that history is divine providence, and therefore what is historically successful has to be accepted and presumed to be superior to that which has gone down. Burckhardt did not say this, but he reveals an equivalent lack of reflection.

The attack on natural right especially by historicism has one very great advantage for us, because it, and positivism, destroys the simply dogmatic acceptance of our belief in natural right and forces us to go back to the very roots of this notion. Therefore I will say something about *the* elementary premise underlying the idea of natural right and present this premise to you without any attempt at proof, so that you can see for yourself whether this is an evident or unevident premise. I would like to link this discussion with what I said at the beginning when I spoke about

[xiv] Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897), Swiss-German historian, author of the well-known *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore (London: Penguin Books, 1990). Strauss refers to his *Reflections on History*, trans. M. D. Hottinger (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1979).
[xv] In the transcript: "(?)"

what political philosophy as such is, and I said that in its primary and full meaning, it is a quest for the best regime. Now what has this to do with natural rights? I address the question to you.[xvi]

Well, which is the most famous book on the best regime?

Student: The *Republic*.

LS: Yes, and is this not almost an answer to my question? What is the theme of the *Republic*? What is the question explicitly raised? Justice. And this means what is by nature just: natural right, a term which occurs quite frequently in the *Republic*. What Plato implies is that the best social order is that order which is just according to nature, with implications, under the most favorable circumstances. Really the two questions are inseparable from each other. We cannot raise the question as to what is the best social order without raising the question as to what is intrinsically just, and vice versa. When Aristotle referred to the question of the best regime in the fifth book of the *Ethics*, he says the best regime is *one*, meaning it cannot change in fundamental structure regardless of differences of place and time. It is one by nature. Note the use of the word "nature": the fundamental premise of political philosophy in its original sense is that there is nature, and therein all problems are concentrated. I have discussed this subject somewhat in the third chapter of my book, and I will not repeat what I said there but will proceed in a somewhat different way.[xvii]

What does that mean? Don't we still speak of nature? Is it not obvious that there is such a thing as nature? Now this is not the decisive point. We could say to begin with that a specific understanding of nature is implied in the notion of natural right. Now what is this specific assumption? *That nature is or supplies the norm*. And that has become absolutely questionable to modern man, immediately due to the influence of modern natural science. And that of course is the fundamental premise underlying the fact-value distinction: facts, which means primarily the natural facts, do not tell us anything about how we ought to live individually or collectively. Think of the recent discussion of the Kinsey Report,[xviii] where Kinsey says, "Look! There are so many sodomists in society," and people write and say, "So what?" Nothing would follow from that, obviously. That does not prove the distinction between facts and values, but it is proof given certain premises. Now this is by no means limited to the scientific discussion in the narrow and methodological consideration; it has very much to do with the moral taste of modern man. I will read you a passage from Melville.[xix] Here he speaks of the problem of nature:

"At this point in the story, the herb-doctor's peddling of Mother Nature's Own Cure is severely challenged by a highly entertaining skeptic . . . He is a "man from Missouri"—the type of a frontiersman, a Daniel Boone or Davy Crockett, and dressed to the part, even to the

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[xvi] The transcriber notes: "No response."

[xvii] Strauss refers to his *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), especially to the third chapter, "The Origin of the Idea of Natural Right," 81-119.

[xviii] Biologist Alfred Kinsey published the results of his research on human sexuality in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* in 1948, followed by *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953).

[xix] Strauss reads from Lawrence Thompson's *Melville's Quarrel with God* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 319. Strauss reads Thompson's framing of the Melville passages, along with the passages as reproduced in Thompson from Melville's *The Confidence-Man* (1857).

double-barrelled gun in his hand. Approaching the consumptive miser, he growls a warning against the herb-doctor:

"'Yarbs, yarbs; natur, natur; you foolish old file you! He diddled you with that hocus-pocus, did he? . . . Because a thing is nat'ral, as you call it, you think it must be good. But who gave you that cough? Was it, or was it not, nature? . . . ' [You see, nature is so far from being good that she is the cause of evil, as well as good—LS]

"'Oh, that a Christian man should speak agin natur and yarbs—' . . . '—ain't sick men sent out into the country; sent out to natur and grass?'

"'Ay, and poets send out the sick spirit to green pastures, like lame horses turned out unshod to the turf to renew their hoofs. A sort of yarb-doctors in their way, poets have it that for sore hearts, as for sore lungs, nature is the grand cure. But who froze to death my teamster on the prairie? And who made an idiot of Peter the Wild Boy?'" [To which the skeptic replies—LS]

When the herb-doctor tries to convert him to the true faith, the man from Missouri snaps at him: "I have confidence in distrust [a scientist—LS]; more particularly as applied to you and your herbs." As the argument continues, the skeptic echoes certain remarks Captain Ahab made about Mother Nature, in *Moby-Dick*. The Confidence-Man says:

"'Now, can you, who suspect nature, deny, that this same nature not only kindly brought you into being, but has faithfully nursed you to your present vigorous and independent condition? Is it not to nature that you are indebted for that robustness of mind which you so unhandsomely use to her scandal? Pray, is it not to nature that you owe the very eyes by which you criticise her?'

"'No! for the privilege of vision I am indebted to an oculist, who in my tenth year operated upon me in Philadelphia. Nature made me blind and would have kept me so. My oculist counter-plotted her.'"[xx]

That's all we need.

Now there are an infinite number of [. . .] to see how this is connected. And this is the way the notion is frequently presented in a certain kind of literature: "Premodern man was a child. He had a childlike faith in nature or in nature's God. We know now what nature really is. Nature is not the kind mother; she is an enemy, and the whole activity of man consists in a conquest of nature. [You don't conquer your friends—LS] Nature is hostile to man; nature has to be overcome."[xxi] I believe you are familiar with this notion, and you see that what I call this moral taste is as important a part of the argument as the so-called methodological consideration. They are connected somehow one with another. I give you one example. When Thomas Hobbes introduced his term "state of nature" into political theory, he did not coin that term. It is found in earlier times—in Cicero, for example. And Hobbes himself used the term once or twice in the old sense, but he changed the meaning. What did "the state of nature" mean originally? It meant

[xx] Thompson, *Melville's Quarrel*, 319-20. The Melville passages are from *Confidence-Man* (Library of America, 1984), chapter 21, "A Hard Case," 953-56.
[xxi] Strauss's summary of a view of premodern man; the phrase in brackets is Strauss's interjection.

the good state, the healthy state. One is in his natural state when he is not blind, for example, and has no other defects. In Hobbes "the state of nature," as you know, is the beastly state, and the whole effort of man consists in getting out of that state of nature. So Melville and Hobbes are in full agreement, only Hobbes does not have such a hatred against nature but he has the same understanding of nature. To know what we are talking about we must clarify this point. Did not the older thinkers who spoke of nature as the norm know what Melville knew? Did they really use nature in the sense of being always kind and never beastly? What did they mean when they said nature was the norm? Did they mean nature was kind? Look at this man from Missouri. He complains that he was blind once. He has certain other defects of which he does not complain or even mention. For example, he cannot bark, he has no wings. Why does he not resent these defects? Because blindness is really a defect of man as man; barking is not a defect of man as man. So the ground of his revolt against nature is given by nature. That is what the older thinkers meant, not more. So I would say whatever profundity there may be in Melville, it does not really touch on the issue.

Now to clarify what nature originally meant, let us turn to some old texts. The oldest text in which it occurs is [5]the *Odyssey*, tenth book, [6][line] 304. I remind you of the context. Odysseus is coming back, and he has reached the land of the Phaeacians, where he meets Nausicaa. And he is telling the Phaeacians at a banquet the story of his travels, more particularly about what happened on the island where Circe lives. Circe is a goddess, but she lives on earth and she bewitches men by drugs and transforms them into beasts. She has transformed twenty-two of Odysseus's comrades into pigs, but in such a way that they retain their human minds. Odysseus does not know what [has] happened to them [and] is trying to find out about them when he is met by the god Hermes, who informs him about what happened to his comrades. It is in this context where the word nature, a great and important word, occurs for the first time.

"'Whither now again, hapless man' [Hermes says to Odysseus—LS], 'dost thou go alone through the hills, knowing naught of the country. Lo, thy comrades yonder in the house of Circe are penned like swine in close-barred sties. And art thou come to release them? Nay, I tell thee, thou shalt not thyself return, but shalt remain there with the others. But come, I will free thee from harm, and save thee. Here, take this potent herb, and go to the house of Circe, and it shall ward off from thy head the evil day. And I will tell thee all the baneful wiles of Circe. She will mix thee a potion, and cast drugs into the food; but even so she shall not be able to bewitch thee, for the potent herb that I shall give thee will not suffer it. And I will tell thee all. When Circe shall smite thee with her long wand, then do thou draw thy sharp sword from beside thy side, and rush upon Circe, as though thou wouldst slay her. And she will be seized with fear, and will bid thee lie with her. Then do not thou thereafter refuse the couch of the goddess, that she may set free thy comrades, and give entertainment to thee. But bid her swear a great oath by the blessed gods, that she will not plot against thee any fresh mischief to thy hurt, lest when she has thee stripped she may render thee a weakling and unmanned.' So saying, Hermes[xxii] gave me the herb, drawing it from the ground, and showed me its nature. At the root it was black, but its flower was

[xxii] Strauss modifies Murray's translation from "Argeiphontes" to "Hermes." The Greek in this line is "Argeiphontes," which is one of the epithets of Hermes; Strauss apparently sticks with Hermes to avoid confusing the students and distracting from the point at hand. (The previous instance of Homer naming this god, in the lines just before Strauss's citation, is in the Greek "Hermes.")

like milk. Moly the gods call it, and it is hard for mortal men to dig; but with the gods all things are possible."[xxiii]

Hermes here showed Odysseus the nature of a drug. What is that nature, what is meant here by nature? It would seem the *look* of that herb; at least only the color of the root and of the flower of that plant are named. It is not certain that only the looks are meant, but it is the most natural explanation. Now this drug is apparently unknown to man; only the name [given it by] the gods[7] is mentioned, which seems to show that man does not have a name for it. It is difficult of access to men—difficult, but not impossible. It is easy of access to the gods: the gods *can* everything.[xxiv] But Circe is a goddess herself and she is *powerless* against the drug. If Odysseus takes this drug, she cannot do anything to him. And apparently Hermes the god cannot help Odysseus against the bewitching drug of Circe except by giving him this particular drug. Still, the gods *can* everything. It is quite interesting that the statement that "the gods can everything" and "nature" occur in almost the same line. Now "the gods can everything" means here that the gods can *find* everything; they can know everything because the gods are all-powerful, if we may say so, because they know the nature of all things. Does this mean that knowledge as knowledge is all-powerful? No, because men are not all-powerful even though they might know something, and there is death especially. But the gods are immortal. The gods therefore might be all-powerful because that great limit of power, death, does not apply to them[xxv] —by virtue of knowledge.

The term "nature" occurs first in a speech of Odysseus, a man of many wiles, who reports its use by the gods. The gods show him the nature of a thing. This nature is not the nature of that particular thing which Hermes was digging up but of a *kind* of thing. It is not this individual herb which has the nature; all things of the same kind have the same nature. The nature is either identical with the looks, or at least identifiable by the looks. If it is not identical with the nature, it means the character of the thing by virtue of which it has a specific effect; for example, the effect of being an antidote to Circe's bewitching. More precisely, it is the character of a kind of thing. It is not altogether unimportant to note that by virtue of this knowledge which Odysseus allegedly owes to Hermes—Odysseus sometimes lies—Odysseus can safely sleep with a goddess. What that means in the whole of the poem, the *Odyssey*,[8] is a very long question and an important question, but we shall disregard that here. In the context, it appears that nature cannot be changed by the gods—otherwise the herb would not be potent against Circe's bewitching drugs—whereas human beings can be changed by Circe into swine. Gods are very powerful, but there is a limit to their power; and this limit consists in the fact that things, kinds of things or some kinds of things have an unchangeable character. This I think is implied in the first mention of nature, and it is a meaning which has never disappeared in classical philosophy. Do you see a connection between that and natural right? Do you anticipate one? I have to ask a number of other [. . .] to make this clear.

Student: [. . .]

[xxiii] Homer, *Odyssey*, 10. 281-306. Strauss reads from the *Odyssey*, trans. A. T. Murray, revised by G. Dimock (Loeb Classical Library, vol. 104 & 105) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919).
[xxiv] Strauss's phrasing "the gods *can* everything" is his translation of "*theoi de te panta dunantai*" (10. 306). Strauss proceeds to explain what he understands by "can everything."
[xxv] The tape was changed at this point.

LS: But what . . . By the way, there is something to that. In a certain crude notion of natural right, that is exactly said: that is what is right everywhere, unchangeable by men and God. But there is something else and more immediately important, that man has such an unchangeable nature, which must be rightly understood. It does not mean that man cannot become blind, or insane and so on. These are defects of human beings. But that which constitutes a human being in its completeness, that is unchangeable.

Student: [. . .]

LS: The question is one we cannot possibly tackle. Whether there is not a connection between the fact that we have here the statement "the gods can everything" illustrated by the metamorphosis achieved by Circe and then introduced . . . the concept of nature, which casts some shadow on these other things. And that may have something to do with this seemingly comical thing: that Odysseus, by virtue of his discovery, is enabled to have a very great pleasure—because it must be assumed to be [so]—which no human being otherwise could have. The reason why I regard this as important is that at the beginning of the *Odyssey*, where they tell the story of Odysseus's father and the maid, and they are now old: he was once enamored of her, but nothing happened because Odysseus's father was fearing the wrath of his wife. Now Odysseus travels and a god teaches him. This is by no means negligible.

I would like to mention only one other point. There is to my mind only one other passage in the two poems which can be compared to this brief remark here, and that is in the *Iliad*: the shield of Achilles. The shield of Achilles is a kind of equivalent of this remark, because it is the only statement in the poetry of Homer in which the whole is described. And who describes the whole, or who paints the shield? A god. In other words, the most important information about the whole and this information about nature are both given by gods. But this is a very fine point and would require a very long discussion. I certainly would not believe that it is an accident that the word "nature" occurs only once in Homer and [that] it occurs in this particular place.

Mr. Goldwin:[xxvi] Isn't there some sort of a gap between saying that certain things or certain kinds of things have a nature, and talking about nature as we speak of it with a capital N?

LS: In other words, this meaning of nature, meaning the whole of things, is not the original meaning of the word. We come to that later. Originally it means not more than the inherent unchangeable character of a thing. I will give you a few examples. In the oldest fragment of a so-called philosophic text which has come down to us, by Anaximander, we find the statement, which I translate very superficially: "That out of which the beings become and that into which they perish is the limitless."[xxvii] Meaning all beings come into being or perish, and they come into being or perish out of something which he called the unlimited, limitless, which implies one thing: a being is essentially limited. To be means to be limited: limited in time, of course, [to] come into being and perish. But it means something else which is more important: distinct. And that means you have a limit: the unlimited is the undistinct. In other words, to be means to be something, to be something distinct. Distinct through what? Through looks and time. By

[xxvi] Following Goldwin's name, the transcriber notes: "(who should have been studying for prelims)."
[xxvii] Anaximander, fragment 2. Presumably Strauss's translation. See, e.g., Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), 19.

"character" I mean that which is not directly visible but is only revealed somehow by the looks, and which is ultimately a cause [of] why the looks are what they are.

Nature [here] means[9] then this: Nature is that which makes the being what it is. Does this apply to every being? This question is of crucial importance. Another old philosophic statement by Heraclitus: "War is the father of all things, and the king of all things. It reveals the one as God and the others as men, and it made the one slave and the others free men."[xxviii] We don't have to go into the question of war here. But there is something that generates and rules all things; and this which generates and rules all things reveals certain beings as what they are, as gods or as men, whereas it *makes* other things[10] what they are. Now Heraclitus is here referring to empirical facts. How did people become slaves in former times? Prisoners . . . war, so that war makes slaves and free men. They are free because they won; they are not free men by nature.[xxix] This is human war. But there is another war, whatever that might mean, which does not *make* gods or men but which *reveals* some as gods and some as men. Now here we have a fundamental distinction of beings: some which are *made* literally what they are, and some which cannot be made but only revealed as what they are. The distinction here implied is that which is common in classical literature between nature and convention, or nature and law. Something which depends on human agreement: law or convention. There is no inner necessity. There is no inner necessity for the fact that men taken prisoners in war should be slaves. They have no particular quality which singles them out as slaves. They could be killed or sent home. It is just an agreement that men make that prisoners should become slaves. Things like the organization of a university, with its divisions, departments, and chairmen of departments, are merely agreements made by men; a university could be organized differently.

But there are other distinctions, for example, dogs and cats, which are not made by human agreement. Now nature is that which makes such beings, which we may call natural beings, what they are. There is a certain intermediate stratum, if I may say so, between merely convention and natural things, and that is artifacts. Artifacts are made by man, but they do not have such arbitrariness because they have to take into consideration nature all the time. In the case of a shoe, an artifact, it obviously must imitate the shape of the foot; otherwise it won't be a good shoe. So artifacts are in an intermediate position.

The really fundamental distinction is between nature and human convention, and not that between nature and artifacts. And you see immediately the crucial importance that has for the question of right, because the laws or customs or manners—which are all the same thing—which people have are to a considerable degree merely convention: that you should wear your hair long or short, and regard long hair as dignified and short hair as unbecoming, or the other way around . . . customs may differ from country to country and even contradict, such as taking off one's hat in an elevator and not taking off one's hat. Each custom can be defended because you need similar things. But the question is whether all law, custom, manners have this character, whether they do not have somewhere ingredients which are as necessary and stable and independent of human arbitrariness as the difference between cats and dogs. Certain things are what they are independently of any arbitrary action; their character inheres in them. For example,

[xxviii] Heraclitus, fragment 53. Presumably Strauss's translation. See Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, 28.

[xxix] In the transcript: "(They are free because they won.) (They are not free men by nature.)"

see Sophocles's *Antigone*, verses 341 to 342. The term "nature" is used in the same sense as two other Greek words which can be translated by "tribe" and "nation." The nature of fishes, the tribe of birds, the nation of land animals. Now what does "nature" mean here? Originally it means inherent character, but the character of a class: not only this herb, but all herbs of this kind. But being the character of a class, the class itself can also be called nature. Its members belong together. We see particularly in the case of animals and plants where this belonging together is shown by the possibility of procreation; that is how little arbitrary that is. A male and female horse normally generate another horse. They belong together; beings distinct from each other but belonging together because they share the same character.

To summarize this point: To be means to be something, to have a distinct character—to have a distinct character inherently, not by virtue of any making. Yet this character proves to be something which is shared by many beings. This is one fundamental root of what nature came to mean. But there is also another meaning of nature, very old, which is seemingly unrelated to what I have said up to now. The best place to find this meaning of nature is found in the tenth book of Plato's *Laws*. Nature means the first thing, or, as Plato says a little more precisely, the change occurring about or around or in connection with the first thing.[xxx] To repeat: nature means on the one hand, character, class character, and on the other hand, the first thing. How can we understand that? We look for one moment at the etymology of the word. It comes from a Greek word [LS writes on the blackboard] [. . .] which means to bring forth, to produce, to put forth, to beget, to engender. So we could say perhaps that the original meaning of *physis* is something like origin or birth. This was seen by the man who translated the word into Latin, *natura*, where the connection with the word *nascor*, "being born," is obvious. Origin and birth, and therefore also the *seed* out of which a being comes. The stock; and naturally when you speak of stock, you think primarily of the specific stock. From what stock do you come refers to your stock, your kin. And now this stock puts a stamp on all who come from it: it is not only the coming from that stock but also having the character characteristic of that stock. That is the first meaning. But now one little step: there may be a stock of all stock, a stock from which all stocks originally became. There may be seeds which are not the seeds of this or that tribe, but of all being. In that sense, nature would be the first seed. For example, atoms in the atomistic doctrine: nature would not mean so much the visible universe as the atom and other elements of this kind. First thing.

Now generally speaking, we can say this. Originally the meaning in philosophy of nature was the first thing, the origin of all kinds. Take the best known and simple case: atoms, the origin of everything. So there are dogs and cats, and they have different natures, surely, but they cannot be understood, these natures, except if you discover what configuration of atoms constitute cats and dogs. So you trace the nature of a class to the original first things. The fundamental change which was effected in philosophy by Socrates can be stated very simply as follows: "You are looking for the first things. The first things are the natures." Does this make sense? To repeat: You have two meanings of nature, the first things and the class characters. And Socrates says the first things are the class characters. I mention Socrates not only because that is such an important event in the history of human thought, but it is of a special importance because through Socrates an articulated natural right doctrine came into being for the first time. And there is some connection between Socrates's originating political philosophy or natural right teaching in an

[xxx] Plato, *Laws* 888d7-899d4.

elaborate sense and his holding or suggesting this view that first things are the class characters. Do you recognize in this statement a textbook truth, when I say the first things are the class characters? What do they say about Plato? Ideas, sure. The famous Platonic doctrine of ideas is one interpretation of what Socrates says, but not a deviation from it but a more specific interpretation.[xxxi] The ideas, the class characters, are the first things. You can understand their connection, you can understand the whole of these class characters in their inner articulation, but Socrates says that is all you have to understand. The question of the coming into being of that class character . . . doesn't make sense. The ideas are not made. This much is a bare minimum of what one ought to know when one uses the word "nature" in such a context. But one question I have not even touched upon explicitly, which is of course crucial: In all these understandings of nature, Socrates or anti-Socratic, until modern times, nature was understood as the standard. What have these things to do with a standard? Do you see a connection? Yes, a norm: call it norm or call it [a] standard. What have atoms and their falling, or any other idiotic first things to do with a standard? Are we not much brighter than and intelligent than atoms can be? How can they be our standard?

Student: [. . .]

LS: Yes, the orderliness . . . but let us start from scratch. We have first to consider the difference between nature and convention. We start from a fact with which we are familiar: cultural relativism. Because what is really observable in this respect was of course always known: law, manners, customs differ from tribe to tribe. This is not a mere difference—true, whether you make the first-born son the sole heir or divide the whole estate among all the children, a good case can be made for both solutions and one can toss a coin; but this won't do, i.e., this does not get down to the matter because there are certain cases in which the admission of one [law or custom] implies the rejection of the other *not only for your tribe but for all men*. And these are the really important and sacred cases. Some of you may have read Herodotus, [who is] really invaluable for an understanding of these things, and when he describes burial rights you learn that some people burn their dead and others bury them. Now each of these peoples does not say, "Well, you can do what you want with your dead; you can burn them if you want to." No, for the one people the practice of the other is terrible, abominable. Take a thing like human sacrifice. That is not a thing where one can say, "Well, you can sacrifice your children or goats; it does not make any difference." Such an idea is inhuman. People never felt that way before they became relativists. And it is really a matter of whether *it is good*, so that people who sacrifice their children were not criminals but people who believed that there were very good reasons, sacred reasons, for sacrificing their children. When we look at the claims raised by the most important manners, laws, and customs, we see that these different nations and tribes not only differ from each other but they contradict each other. And in the moment people become aware of that, they must raise the question, if they are sane and rational beings: Who is right? Because it is impossible to say at the same time that it is holy and not holy to sacrifice one's children, etc.

That Odysseus, who was the first man to use the word "nature," was a traveler is not an accident. At the very beginning of the *Odyssey* it is said that he is a man who has seen many cities and known the minds of many men.[xxxii] In one version it is even [that] he knew the *laws* of many

[xxxi] In the transcript: "(not a deviation from it but a more specific interpretation)."
[xxxii] *Odyssey*, 1.1-5.

men. He became so wise because he got out of that simple immersion in one particular tribal tradition. You can also state it as follows. Originally men assumed that the good is identical with what is customary with them, the ancestral; this was axiomatic primarily. But that is a thesis which is untenable. One cannot just identify the good with the ancestral or not, and in the first case I have a stationary society and in the second a progressive society. No, the thesis that the good is identical with the ancestral is *absurd*. But that was a great moment, in a way the greatest moment in the history of the human mind, when the impossibility of this simple equation was fully realized. And in that moment people were forced to see the good, no longer guided by ancestral tradition, and how could they find it? Certainly not in what people have agreed upon in a given tribe, because people can agree on all kind of things, but their agreement cannot make truth. Agreement may be within certain limits a sign of truth—may be, but not necessarily. People may all have the same foolish prejudices. So in the perspective in which men discovered nature originally, or realized the significance of inherent characters of classes of things, in this perspective nature [. . .] as that which does not depend on human arbitrariness. That is not the whole story, but it is an important part of it. All human agreement can be varied *ad infinitum* and as men see fit, but there are certain things which they cannot change and which give them the only possible guidance. And that is what is in nature not subject to change: the natural.

Student: [. . .]

LS: Either you have this equation, the good is identical with the ancestral, [11][or] if this does not work because of different and contradictory ancestrals, you must find something which is not dependent on agreement, convention, or arrangement among human beings, but something which has an inner necessity. You can understand this in a very narrow way. That is, for example, the way in which Machiavelli understands it by saying there are certain hard necessities which cannot be changed by men, objective necessities as they would be called in the nineteenth century, which are the only things which are absolutely certain. For example, if you do not have a bodyguard, you cannot oppress the common people. This is of some help, but it is of course not what was originally meant by nature. What is the other thing? The other thing has to do with the class character, because the class character is a standard as regards the members of the class. Take the example of Melville. How do we know blindness is a defect? Because man by his own constitution is born to see with two eyes. There is something else. If we look at living beings, and more particularly at animals, we see that animals change in their life, and in their life there is a particular natural curve by virtue of which a peak is distinguishable as a peak not made by us, not imposed upon us, not an arbitrary preference of ours: infancy, childhood, growth. There is a high point of maturity . . . Just looking at this natural curve of animals and plants, we see there is a certain distinction which nature itself makes between the peak and what leads up to the peak. And connected with that are the various kinds of defects which are not necessary, remaining behind the normal, like blindness and others.

Student: [. . .]

LS: But the basis of the whole enterprise was familiarity with other cultures. Look, under certain conditions men travel. They may travel for a no-good reason, and then they are no good. Other travelers have perfect excuses, like Odysseus: a god prevented him from coming home. He was forced to absent himself from home, so he saw other people: he saw the variety and the

contradictions, and he started to think. His home-bred customs ceased to be for him a matter of course.

Student: [. . .]

LS: Well, because he met Nausicaa, a girl, and she behaved exactly like girls in Greece did; and he saw horses and dogs, etc., and they behaved absolutely as they did in Greece. Fire burns in Persia as it does in Greece.[xxxiii] There are certain things which are not dependent on human arbitrariness.

Student: [. . .]

LS: No, he saw that if you behave like a nasty brute, you are nowhere liked however different the human beings are. If you offend people, you are likely to create reactions.[xxxiv]

The case of man is fundamentally the same as the case of horses with its [natural] curve. There is a similar structure of man and human life which allows us to recognize and[12] distinguish between what is by nature complete and what is incomplete. You can see this every day. When a farmer tells his son to bring him a horse and his son brings him a colt, the farmer complains that his orders have not been carried out. The son replies, "Is not a colt a young horse?" "Yes, but when we speak of a horse, we speak of a complete one." Another example: We don't use the word "people" when we refer to children or women. These differences are embodied in human language everywhere. This fact, that we mean by a horse a complete horse and not a very young horse or a dying horse, this fact we have to learn by living with natural things. The case of man is so complicated because man is not as simple as a donkey or a horse. Man, to mention just one point, has two peaks: bodily perfection, a young man or woman; but there are certain imperfections associated with youth, so that men of all times say that there is another peak at a more mature age. In former times, men saw that this second kind of peak is more important for guiding men than the earlier peak. This fact that men have two peaks shows that the question of human perfection is more difficult to analyze than that of other animals. But the crucial point is this, that the notion of nature used is fundamentally the same in both cases. The nature of man is more complicated.

But—and this is of crucial importance—if we take the perfection of man as that of the second peak most seriously, we make a shocking observation: that whereas most cats and dogs and horses live according to nature, reach their fulfillment perfectly, very few human beings do. And this needs special reflection, to understand why this is so. One interpretation, given by Plato and Aristotle, too, is that man lives in a peculiar way, as no other being does, in between animals and gods; and therefore there is no prospect that man, or very many men, will reach the full

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[xxxiii] Strauss draws on Aristotle's discussion of justice in book 5 of *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1134b24-28: "Some people think that all rules of justice are merely conventional, because whereas a law of nature is immutable and has the same validity everywhere, as fire burns both here and in Persia, rules of justice are seen to vary. That rules of justice vary is not absolutely true, but only with qualifications." *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (Loeb Classical Library, vol. 73) (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926).

[xxxiv] Here the transcriber notes: "(I could not make any sense out of this part of the tape due to my inability to understand the questions-comments to which Dr. Strauss is responding.)"

perfection of man. But the understanding of nature implied, as the character of the class, therewith pointing to a peculiar perfection peculiar to that class, is common in all cases.

[1] Deleted “ancient’
[2] Deleted “but.”
[3] Deleted “alone.”
[4] Deleted “that.”
[5] Deleted “in.”
[6] Deleted “verse.”
[7] Moved “give[n] it.”
[8] Deleted “it.”
[9] Moved “here.”
[10] Deleted “as.”
[11] Deleted “and.”
[12] Deleted “allows us to.”

Session 6A and 7A: No date
From Nature to Thomas Paine

Leo Strauss: He explains why nature is the standard. It is the nature of a thing which is its character, the character of the class to which the thing belongs. There exists the possibility for the individual thing of either living up to the class character, complying with its purpose, or else falling short of it.

Before I go on, I would like to know whether I have made this point clear enough, or whether you see any difficulties which you think we could profitably discuss now. If not, I will go on and perhaps give occasion for discussion by some remarks I make . . . Now if this notion of nature,[1] in the original meaning of nature, is the basis for the very concept of natural right, we may assume that the [main][i] reason for the decay of natural right doctrines is the abandonment of the original concept of nature. In this process, one crucial premise remained unchanged in most cases, namely, that the understanding of human things, of human affairs depends on the understanding of nature. Now that is precisely the premise which, say, Plato and Aristotle share with present-day positivism: we must understand human things ultimately in the light of nature. But in positivism in the present-day school, nature is no longer understood as it was originally. Nature means here—if we can try to define the almost undefinable, nature is everything that is, or, to make use of Kant's definition of nature, the totality of phenomena in space and time. The totality of phenomena in space and time, and there are no phenomena beyond space and time. In other words, "natural" means anything occurring in space and time, and with this further implication: the specific—say, this particular human action or maybe even man or dog—the specific has to be understood in the light of the universal. The universal is here understood as something like loose matter that may be defined in various ways but must not affect the fundamental understanding, which means that the human, the specifically human, has to be understood in the light of the subhuman. That is the necessary consequence of this notion of nature. That's the fundamental principle: that the human must be understood in the light of nature and of the whole is common to positivism and also to the original notion of philosophy or science.

Now this has of course a long history, this modern and present-day notion of the natural. And one can say in a more conventional way as follows, that at the beginning of modern science, the formal and final causes were abandoned and only the material and efficient causes were preserved. Now according to Aristotle's analysis there are four kinds of causes, and the reasonableness of his position can be seen if you look at any carpenter, shoemaker, and so on. When a shoemaker makes a shoe, he must first know what is he going to make—a shoe—which means of course that he must have a notion of what a shoe looks like, of the shape of a shoe, of the form of a shoe. That is the formal cause. But even that he could not know if he did not know what shoes are for: they are for being worn on the feet. So there is a final cause: the purpose for which the shoe is made. And then again, after knowing the final and formal causes, he can look around for material, for material which would be good for that purpose and fits into that form: leather, wood, or whatever it may be. Not iron, of course—at least not iron, if not heavily

[i] Brackets in the original transcript.

qualified. So we have here leather and thread and wood as the proper materials. That is the material cause. And then of course, last but not least, [the efficient cause]:[ii] the shoemaker himself who makes, who puts together the shoe by shaping the material with a view to the form, and the form ultimately related to the end[2] [to] which the shoe is put.

[3][These are] Aristotle's four kinds of causes. And Aristotle says all natural things have also to be viewed in the light of this distinction, with one exception: [4]in natural things, the formal cause and the final cause coincide. In other words, if a horse generates a horse, he does not do it for our use of the horse as a battle horse or whatnot, but just for generating a horse. And so natural things form the ends of their being, if they are beings and not something[5] opposite, despite the notion of teleology that natural things serve *man's* end. For this is not essential to their being, although Aristotle occasionally refers to it for some good reason, but we miss this difficult matter in our present-day science.[iii] Now in modern thought, in modern science, you can say the formal and final causes are simply abandoned in favor of the material and efficient causes, which means, in other words, that to understand a thing means to understand how it is generated, the "how" including also that from which it is generated. Now from this point of view the forms—or to link it up now with what I said before, the class characters—are derivative. They don't play any role in the process. A most beautiful popular example is of course the theory of evolution. The class characters are just byproducts, wholly uninteresting to the process itself or the evolution of the process, the generation. The species are not something which are especially constituting that process, preceding it in a way, but they are just byproducts of it.

Now this enormous change, the abandonment of formal and final causes, did not lead immediately to the abandonment of natural right, but to a modification of those natural right doctrines which Plato and Aristotle had developed. In accordance with this we make a distinction between two types of natural right, and I think[6] [this] the most important distinction we have to make, which we shall call "classic" and "modern" natural right. Classic natural right is that based on the original notion of nature, and modern natural right is based on the modern notion of nature which arose in the seventeenth century. I will mention here only one point, because we have to take it up later at greater length. Modern natural right does not take its bearings by the ends, by the completed nature of men, but by some beginnings, by elements, namely, those elements of men which precede any possible human activity. To illustrate this a bit so that it is not wholly vague: whereas the older doctrine of natural right derives any particular propositions for human action from the end of man, from the perfection of man—or, as the popular word goes, virtue—the modern natural right doctrine derives all specific [. . .][iv]

You must know: What is sleep? Or take an example from our field. Is it possible really to understand political matters without having some understanding of what is political? A question which is exactly that of the nature of political things. Now questions of this kind are of course trans-scientific in the modern sense of the word "science," and yet they concern something

[ii]The transcriber bracketed the words "[efficient cause]," which appears at the end of the sentence in the original transcript. The phrase has been moved.

[iii] The transcriber put the preceding sentences in brackets: "[Despite the notion of teleology that natural things serve *man's* end—for this is not essential to their being, although Aristotle occasionally refers to it for some good reason. But we miss this difficult matter in our present-day science.]"

[iv] At this point the transcript breaks off and resumes on a new page.

which is not beyond science in the sense that we may disregard it or wait until we come to it, but the basis of science, without which the questions which science raises can never become fully clear questions.

So to repeat, we can see most directly the importance of the old notion of nature by reminding ourselves of the fact that the primary question is in each case: What is the thing which we are going to investigate? Or in other words, understanding of the thing to be explained necessarily precedes the explanation. The second point from which we can immediately see is that philosophy [of nature] is the need which we have and which we can clearly realize for nonarbitrary standards. We appeal to nonarbitrary standards every time we speak of improvement or preservation—I have mentioned that before—when we speak of anything to be done either by ourselves or by society. That presupposes that the standard which we apply is a nonarbitrary standard. It is meant to be nonarbitrary. We cannot clarify that without making clear the implication of both improvement and preservation, better or worse, good or bad. So we have always opinions about what is good and bad, and this opinion calls, forces us as thinking beings to raise the question: What is truly good, what is truly bad, what is simply good, what is simply bad? And the third point, which links up the first two which I have mentioned, is this. There is a connection, or we divine a connection between the standard for which we are seeking, for which we are groping, and "man," meaning this: people today don't speak of standards as essentially related to man, because they talk about "values"—and the values are somewhere located; one doesn't know where[7]—[and] it is somehow taken for granted that you can understand "values" without understanding man, without thinking of man. But that is a delusion, I believe.

If you remember—remind yourself of the lists of kinds of values which Beck gave in his textbook.[v] You remember: biological, aesthetic, moral, religious, and other kinds of values. You see that this list of values actually reflects a list or an order of beings, or more precisely, it reflects an order of man, of the human soul. There is simple mere life which we share with the brutes. There is living with others. There is thinking. There is directiveness toward the superhuman, or whatever you might call it. This whole list of unconnected values becomes meaningful and intelligible only if you relate it back to man and the articulation of the human soul in which it is rooted. Now the question of "What is?"—for example, "What are the political things?"—leads us back inevitably to the question "What is man?," man being the only political being of which we know. And furthermore, the need for nonarbitrary standards leads to a question, leads to a most obvious concern: Why they are connected, the standards and man? And this connection can only be understood on the premise: if there is a nature of man with a specific articulation and a nature guiding us in finding out what is the good human life, what is good for man. And therefore one can only say that there may be all kinds of things which are vague and maybe false in the older doctrine, but one can only say there has never appeared a doctrine which is as comprehensive and as reasonable [as that older doctrine] in giving account of what we are thinking of when thinking of human things in a serious and responsible manner.[8]

Before I go to the next part of my discussion, I would like to find out if there are any objections or questions which you have. I shall not repeat in this course the expositions which I gave in my

[v] Lewis White Beck, *Philosophic Inquiry: An Introduction to Philosophy* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1952), 196-97. See Strauss's discussion in session 2.

book in the first three chapters.[vi] I have partly covered that, much more briefly than I did in the book but sometimes adding considerations which you wouldn't find there. So I would say that a discussion based on what you found as difficulties presented there in the first three chapters would be perfectly in order now.

Student: In connection with the example of the dormative power of opium, isn't the meaning—the modern meaning, the intention of that example—that man takes materials and changes their nature, utilizes them, uses them in a new instrumental way to serve his purposes rather than simply judging their nature from their obvious effects? Do[es] this not show a kind of control of nature or its elements beyond the view that was formerly held, so that it might be too narrow simply to say that it has a dormative effect?

LS: That this does not answer all questions regarding opiate is perfectly correct. But if that[9] [were] the only meaning of the joke, it would be all right. But the meaning was that [10]this answer is a silly answer, you know, and a silly question, whereas that answer is really presupposed in all these instrumental inquiries and uses.

Student: Still, wouldn't they say that the older view was simply to describe the qualities of opium from the outside, as it were, and say it has a dormative effect—it does such-and-such, with the newer view being that you transform it to your own uses: man can do this, which is the thing which has been added, as against the old view.

LS: Yes, I would say that there was very much added in an infinite number of particular cases of very great importance. No one would question it. But of course it would be nonsense to say that the investigation of efficient and material causes was not in principle admitted as necessary by the older notion. You know? They may have neglected the pursuit of these things in favor of others. But the question again—and that is bad, of course—the question is: What is worse, the neglect of the one or the neglect of the other? And I believe one can easily show that the neglect of which modern man is guilty is greater. To take this aspect which you stated: Let us assume something which is by no means actual, namely, that man would have perfect control of everything, that he would be that master and owner of nature which he was set to become at the beginning of modern science. What would this mean? I mean, let us assume man has complete control of physical nature. Would this be of any significance in itself? I would say [it is] of no significance whatsoever if man doesn't know the purpose for which he should use it. And therefore the purpose for which it is to be used is the primary question. So all knowledge of efficient and material causes is in itself blind and therefore not true knowledge, without the primary knowledge of the end for which it is to be used. Of course the tacit premise which was made in the modern technological development was that the ends are a matter of course; we don't have to think about them. Everyone wants to be well-clad, well-housed, well-fed; and obviously these very worthy ends are more easily achieved on the basis of modern technology than before. But you know quite well that this is not sufficient, because these ends are not the whole story, and the question of the relative importance of these ends as contrasted with others would precisely be the question of the ends. Ends are never a matter of course, especially not if isolated.

[vi] *Natural Right and History*, 9-119.

Student: Would you speak a little bit more directly to what you compressed, it seems to me a bit? And that is the reason—I realize it is a difficult or impossible thing—but the reason why the dropping of the formal and final causes in modern natural science at its beginning had a kind of delayed action in the investigations about man and society. You suggested that, first, there was not the total shift away from final and formal causes that would have been a characteristic of modern natural science but that it came later.

LS: If I understand you correctly, what you mean to say is this: that one should have expected in the seventeenth century already an abandonment of natural right and not a mere transformation of natural right. Well, that is a very good question, and I would want to turn to that question later. That need for natural right, meaning for some principal objectives which do not depend upon the arbitrary will of men, is so strong to begin with that it maintained itself as long as possible. Other reasons had to come to shake that. These reasons were of course partly extratheoretical and—well, this is a very long story, but to mention the practically most important thing, that is, this new natural right doctrine was the outcome[vii] of a very powerful social movement, of the modern movement leading up to democracy, industrialism, and so on. And this led to a famous explosion which is popularly called the French Revolution; and [it was] only this great experience of the French Revolution and the shock created by it that led people to entertain the idea that men would be much better off without natural right, because in the meantime the older notion of natural right, the premodern notion, had become forgotten, at least in the Protestant countries. And so the only natural right doctrine[s] which[11] [were] known generally were the modern natural right doctrines, and they had led to that catastrophe, as it was thought to be by many people, the French Revolution. And therefore the question arose: Would we not be much better off without *any* natural right? To take the form in which it was then coined: Would rights of Englishmen not be much better and sounder than rights of man?[viii] Now that people could remain satisfied with this preposterous notion has of course deeper reasons, namely, that between, say, roughly[12] 1600 and 1800, such a complete replacement of natural right doctrines by something else was very slowly prepared, crystallizing only around 1800. I don't know whether that is sufficient as an answer.

Student: Yes. One other thing, though. In principle, then, you would say that the tenets of the modern natural sciences as developed would, if logically carried out, have rejected such a thing as natural right?

LS: I don't know. One can only say this: that natural science as it has developed up to the present day is now incompatible with the notion of natural right. Whether that is absolutely necessary is hard to say, because you must not forget this: Whatever this fact that people may tell you, and the methodology of natural science too, our natural science speaks of organisms. It still speaks therefore of healthy and ill organisms. There is no reason, [in] one way, if that has to be [said, that][ix] there should not be at least a distinction made between healthy human beings and unhealthy human beings. And this health, to be understood, of course means not only of the body but also the mind as well, a healthy human mind. That was fundamentally what earlier was

[vii] In the transcript: "[outcome]"
[viii] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (Penguin Books, 1973), 118. (Originally published 1790.)
[ix] Brackets in the original transcript

meant by virtue. You see? I mean there is still [this element][x] in the present-day orientation there. You know it is not that simple, but one can only perhaps say this: It is undeniable that in the seventeenth century it was thought by some leading men of this movement that all notions of good, beautiful, perfect, and so on had no place in philosophic or scientific orientations. Think, for example, of Spinoza, who is in one way the most radical of these seventeenth-century thinkers. But Spinoza of course saw [that there was] no difficulty whatever in spite of that of developing an ethic which he regarded [as] much scientific as his teaching about mechanics. You see? And whether this was totally wrong or whether the present-day positivists who reject an ethical teaching proper as impossible [are wrong] is a long question. That there are certain difficulties of having an ethics on that basis I would grant, but on the other hand, whether, for example, in the present situation, if you contrast the typical social scientist of the day who rejects, who throws out all of this as a serious teaching—this is John Dewey, who also accepts the modern science and says it is an excellent basis for filling up an ethical teaching.[xi] It is hard to say who is more wrong.

Student: Do I understand you properly, that it is possible that whatever emphasis modern natural science thinks it puts on the four causes, that it's impossible for them to ignore the formal and final causes entirely? The final cause is another matter, because it is identical. Well, is it not true[13]—well, take the simple case: you have a very simple case, you have the composition of water which requires hydrogen and oxygen, and you know the proportion of the mixture. Still, is water not something different from not only hydrogen and oxygen but even from H_2O? For example, even understanding hydrogen and oxygen, you would not know that the mixture of this proportion is *fluid* and the other qualities of water which make water what it is. In other words, is not, when something is produced by certain agencies, by certain materials, the product something new?

LS: Today they talk much about emergence. That is a way of restoring the older notion, but the product of the generation is something fundamentally different than the material and efficient causes. That is what is meant. But take the case most interesting to us: let us assume that we had a perfect account of how men came into being out of nonmen, the ideal goal of all evolutionists. Would it help us any in understanding man? Because the very question which evolution would put is this: We know this being which can, as they put it, use verbal symbols, [and] that come[s] into being at a certain time out of things which could not yet use verbal symbols. Now, how far do we understand that being which can use verbal symbols by knowing that we have here this thing, and that we have that which can't use it—and we would find some brute which doesn't use verbal symbols and yet uses some kind of signs, whatever else it might be, which comes a little bit closer to verbal symbols than other signs used by other brutes? What would it tell us? It would not be uninteresting, but it would not help us a bit in understanding man. That is, the precise question is: What is it that makes it possible for an animal to use verbal symbols? You know, what structure must a mind have which can do that? I believe it would be much too narrow and limited to speak of use of verbal symbols. You could at best say this is the crudest

[x] "[this element]" appears in the transcript.

[xi] See, e.g., John Dewey, "The Logical Conditions of a Scientific Treatment of Morality," in *The Middle Works: 1899-1924*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977), vol. 3, *1903-1906*, 3-39.

sign for someone who knows nothing about man except what would fall within the scope of a zoological garden or something. You know? It would by no means be sufficient. And so this "what" which distinguishes man from nonman, and which we presuppose in any understanding of man and human things, would still be the beginning of all understanding, and all the prehistory wouldn't help us any.

I don't say that the problem—I mean, you only have to remind yourself of the great shock administered to the Western world by Darwin almost a hundred years ago now;[14] there was something, there [was] a great decision involved in that which I don't want to minimize. But in the decisive respect the problem was not touched, because the problem [is] whether[15] there [is] a radical difference between man and nonman—whether then any evolution of the Darwinian type, or maybe even of the Bergsonian type,[xii] can make intelligible the coming-into-being of man. The interesting thing in Darwin, it seems to me, is this. It was the first time that someone brought home to the general mind the possibility of a genesis of species. You see, the notion that man, the human race, had come into being was—no, let me state it still more generally. There are fundamentally two alternatives. Either the human race was always in being—that's the most reasonable possibility, because then we are not forced to fall back to this absurdity that there should ever have been a man who was not generated by a male and female human being. You know, that is the most natural view: Aristotle's. On the other hand, there was always the alternative view of the Bible: there was a first man who therefore could not have been born by man: Adam. Now, but there was a third kind of doctrine, which said the human race has come into being, but not by creation by an omnipotent God but by natural causes. The Epicurean doctrine is the most famous example, in which man like all other species arose out of primordial slime. Equivocal generation, it is called. But in no case did people regard it as possible that a species could develop out of another species. That was an absolutely novel idea, which to my knowledge is not older than about 1750. Then it was suggested, and not more than suggested, by Diderot; but then of course Lamarck and especially Darwin presented it. But that is, in a way, the last consequence of this modern notion that everything has to be understood as generated. That fulfills this methodic demand of modern science more clearly than the Epicurean doctrine apparently does. I don't know whether I answered your question.

Student: There's another point which I want to raise. The great crisis comes, as I understand it, when natural science abandons the, would you say, teleological view, the end as the guiding point. And that left the social sciences, the studies relating to man, without this support of natural science. And that lingered on for a while, the orientation by purpose, but now the trend is away from that.

LS: Well, perhaps one could say this also in partial answer to what Mr. Cox said before. What happened was this—of course it is impossible to understand human things without assuming purposes and ends; that goes without saying. But that goes without saying. But the question is: Can't you understand the ends in terms of efficient causes? And that was done; namely, the end is a desire, as Spinoza put it. When I use the term "end," I mean a desire. Now the desire as creating the end as it were, as positing it, is the efficient cause. So you still can speak popularly of ends, but you understand the ends as mere positions, merely posited by desires, urges, or

[xii] See Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution,* trans. Arthur Mitchell (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 1998).

whatever you might call it. Now the most fundamental[16] [urge] is self-preservation, and therefore self-preservation is not really meant as an end but as an urge[17] yet has the practical function of an end. Now that was—and that is in itself no reason why our psychology, for example, or whatever one might call it, would not use urges and that towards which the urges necessarily point in the same way in which self-preservation was used by Hobbes and Spinoza. And therefore, why should there not be an ethical teaching of this kind? You can loosely call it naturalistic ethics. That is being done today, I think, by quite a few people in a way.

But the reason why this was held in abeyance was fundamentally the so-called historical conscience. In other words, there is such a great variety of urges, a variety caused by differences in historical situations, that it does not make sense to speak of the four or the five basic urges, you know, as the older thinkers would have done. That was however prepared by the natural science itself in the following way. We talk no longer about ends toward which man moves, or perfection, or the forms; we speak only of efficient causes. We start with the basic urges. Now these basic urges are common to men in groups: self-preservation, sex, and so on. Food is simply a subdivision of self-preservation, of course. Now what else is there? I think these are the two most important points, after all, on this level on which man shares with brutes: self-preservation and self-preservation of the species. Now what does it mean?[18] [It] means that all the other features of men which we find, the tremendous variety of human configurations, are absolutely derivative: the higher, what we popularly call the higher, is derivative from the lower; it does not belong to man's natural and essential equipment. And that means, in other words, that man is distinguished from all other brutes by the fact that he is almost infinitely malleable. The other brutes also have self-preservation and preservation of the species, but the way in which they pursue these ends posited by these desires are always the same, with minor variations. But man has an infinite variety of ways in which he can satisfy these basic urges. So the crucial definition of man is not that beast which is concerned with its self-preservation and procreation, because that is true of all brutes, but that beast which is infinitely malleable. At the beginning, when they were still under the spell of older notions, they said "almost infinitely perfectible." But that is already too old-fashioned, because it presupposes still a definite notion of perfection. It is more accurate then to say "infinitely malleable." Now if you have that, what can you say about man? You see, the emphasis shifts absolutely from the almost meaningless universal things, self-preservation and procreation, to the very important but particular ones, namely, what is created by malleability, and these are the historical variations. But that is a very big and extremely important problem, and a problem which I think has barely been touched upon by the people who analyze these things, namely, how much modern science itself is the origin of the so-called historical conscience. The fellow whom we are studying in my seminar now, Montesquieu, is a beautiful example, I think, of that transition, where[19] still chiefly natural causes, like climate, are used in order to explain the malleability of man. That is very imperfect, what I said, isn't it? I know that. But do you have a point you can help me on?

Student: I have a further idea. I don't know whether I should pursue it now, but if it's true that true science would investigate all four causes of everything, then we might say that the failure of ancient science was to give enough emphasis to the material and efficient causes.

LS: Not enough?[xiii] Yes, that I think one can say.

Student: But that whenever it was science, it did give some attention to the material and efficient causes.

LS: Well, if I may limit myself to what I know relatively well and not speak about things that I don't know at all or very poorly, I would say if you look at Aristotle's *Politics* with an eye for these phenomena, you will note that he is as much concerned with the material and efficient causes as with the others. You see, that leads to other problems, where I really am absolutely incompetent. But I remember only from my marginal readings in these matters that a very crucial point in the seventeenth century was the question of experiment, and I think the difference is not so much whether one should deal with material and efficient causes as what one expects from the experiment. Yes? And here there[20] [were] really very basic premises which excluded the experiment in the modern sense—that is the issue insofar as the natural sciences are concerned. And what was that precisely regarding the experiment? Now when you read the discussions, say, even by some people who are the basis of modern science, like Hobbes and Spinoza, against Boyle and other predecessors of the empirical modern science, you see this, that these more old-fashioned men say: Experience is always necessary. That was never questioned by anyone, of course. The question was not experience, but experiment. But what does experiment mean if we look at it from a premodern point of view? Extraordinary things. The experiences to which you should refer should be common experiences: that which you see. But an experiment means something which you artificially create. Yes? Under wholly unreal conditions . . . I mean, I simply do not know another word any better. I think that was the crucial point much more than the question of material and efficient causes. In other words, not whether material and efficient causes should be explored—of course they should—but how they should be explored and whether the controlled experiment is a genuine key to the true material and efficient causes. Now that is of course of crucial importance to the natural sciences, but for the social sciences the problem is irrelevant, considering the irrelevance of experiment for the social sciences proper.

Student: Well, if I keep in mind the original difficulty, the thing that caused the crisis is the fact that the social sciences think that the modern natural science deals with the material and the efficient causes to the exclusion of the formal and final causes. But that's a misunderstanding.

LS: Well, I can't tell you that. I would say, according to what I have read by people who are supposed to know what the theoretical physicists—I mean the most important cases—are really doing, they would say there is nothing of final and formal causes there. They would not, you know, they would not even speak of material and efficient causes any more. The very concept of causes is questioned, and so on.

Student: I wonder why the abandoning of the final and formal causes among the moderns led to consequences in political thought different than those which the people who use these causes . . .

LS: That is a very important question, but since I'm not so sure everyone here understands your question, may I explain it? When we speak of premodern science, we think of course primarily

[xiii] Strauss, apparently correctly, understands the student to have meant "the failure of ancient science was [*not*] to give enough emphasis to the material and efficient causes."

of Aristotle, who had developed in the most comprehensive form a science of all kinds of beings. Also of Plato. But there was another type of science in classical times, and that was partly pre-Socratic, but for our purposes we can limit ourselves to that post-Aristotelian school we call Epicureans, [21]ancient atomists, which played a tremendous role for the emergence of modern natural science. You only have to read in the seventeenth century the heroes, Bacon and so on, to see how much they are linked with the Epicurean doctrine. So we have, in other words, something which is in many important respects akin to modern science. We have already in premodern times . . . that whereas modern science is somehow accompanied by a new type of social or political science, there was no such political or social science connected with the Epicureans. For what was the characteristic feature of Epicureanism, as distinguished from Plato and Aristotle? Answer: It was completely nonpolitical. The simple political teaching of the Epicureans was: Live by yourself. Live in private. Well, of course you had to pay your taxes and this kind of thing, but: Don't be concerned with civil society. Now in premodern times, you were either a Socratic (by "Socratic" I mean like Thomas, Aristotelian, or Stoic), then you were interested in politics; or you were a non-Socratic, e.g., an Epicurean, then you were not interested in politics. In other words, only those philosophers in premodern times were interested in politics who believed that there is natural right. Because if right or justice is not natural, all political activity is despicable—that was the tacit premise universally granted—and then these are just some arrangements which people make for their convenience, and which is as uninteresting to the philosophic mind as the details of public administration. But if it is a matter of the details, not public administration itself but whether you should use blue pencils or red . . . if there is no natural right, no difference between two types of taxes could be of a higher value, could it, than the difference between red and blue pencils?

Now let me state it still more sharply and crudely. There were people who were materialists in classical times: Epicureans. To be a materialist: there is no thing incorporeal; the soul is just a kind of body. The materialists were unpolitical, and the nonmaterialists were political. A puzzle. In modern times we have this absolutely novel phenomenon of politically-interested or public-spirited materialists. Honestly, that is not [as much] a matter of course as we think, because we know so many of them, but it was an absolute novelty. There is no parallel to that in premodern times. Now, why? Because if you take a man like Hobbes or Locke—Hobbes is the simplest example: Hobbes of course admitted natural right. He admitted [it] by this very fact that political things are terribly important, and not only just for convenience. I don't know whether this is sufficient[22] [as] an answer to your question, because your question asks: Why this mixture?

Student: I don't quite see how, in your criticism of the exclusion of the formal and final causes, why modern natural science is concerned with just generation—how this criticism,[23] criticism of the lack of purpose, say, the lack of consideration of purpose, can exclude the point which Horwitz raised at the beginning, mainly an instrumental interpretation of purpose or conventional interpretation of purpose. I mean, your criticism is not sufficient in this sense to distinguish between a conventional interpretation of purpose and an interpretation of purpose naturally.

LS: I really don't understand that. Do you mean the purpose which we have in our operations and in our use, knowledge and handling of natural things, or what?

Student: As Horwitz raised the question in the beginning, he said that modern natural science perhaps is concerned with generation, because to the extent that it wants to know, for instance, why, in what ways it will be . . .

LS: Sure, there is no doubt about that. But the purpose is of course not the purpose of our use; it is our purpose in using those . . . That is wholly extraneous to the opium. Wholly extraneous, and when people spoke of formal and final causes they meant of course[24] formal or final causes *within* the natural being involved—for some the purpose which the horse could use in generating a horse, or for that matter, in eating or grazing.[25] Well, what one can say is only this. It seems that the limitation to efficient and material causes was connected, at least in many cases, with the instrumental understanding of science. That is an entirely different proposition. In other words, according to the older notion science is not in the service of doing something with the results of science, except that it has no other function but to make us understand the whole in which we live and the parts of that whole.[26] I mean, that has been previously said, and that is correct. There is a connection between this notion that science is essentially theoretical and the primary concern with formal and final causes and the modern technological, instrumental understanding of science and the primary and perhaps exclusive concern with material and efficient causes. My criticism was directed exclusively to the view that we can take our bearings without raising the question of what *is*, the question of the formal cause which is[27] in all human things connected with the question of the purpose. That was the only point of my criticism.

Regarding natural science, I can't offer any criticism because I know too little. I can only say this, that natural science in no form existing today or which can be visualized for the future can help us in any way in solving the human problems—which is, by the way, admitted by those men like Bertrand Russell and others who say that questions of purpose fall completely outside of the scope of science.[xiv] As I said, for Aristotle there is no possibility of distinguishing between final and formal causes in natural phenomena. But as for this point, this objection to the scholastics, I don't know how far it is justified. In some cases, it certainly isn't. There are various kinds of stupidities. You know, a typical stupidity of former ages was an unreasonable belief in old authorities, so that people believed that an issue was settled by quoting someone like Aristotle, which of course is silly, because Aristotle too may have erred. And it is quite right to oppose that stupidity, provided one is so sensible as to know that we too have our stupidities. You know, we defer then to these things if an authority is particularly newfangled, modern. That there was such a kind of stupidity is doubtless true, but it has nothing to do with Aristotle, because Aristotle would have regarded a man who when Galileo offered him to look through his telescope and refused to look through it as a very poor fish and not as a true pupil of Aristotle's. That we must distinguish.

So I think I would like to open my next section, and that I would start as follows. We cannot really understand the present status of the question of natural right if we limit ourselves to the discussions which go on in classrooms and books, the scholarly books, because, say, for example, certain notions of what the right method of scientific investigation is, that alone would never explain to us why natural right has almost disappeared from political and also theoretical discussions. I referred to this point before. Until 1800, and probably beyond that, the notion that there is such a thing as natural right was generally accepted. It was never, not even in the Middle

[xiv] Bertrand Russell, *The Impact of Science on Society* (New York: AMS Press, 1968), 10 ff.

Ages, universally accepted. There were always people who doubted it, but the general mind accepted it until that time. But since the nineteenth century an ever-increasing number of men have abandoned the notion that there is such a thing as natural right, and this is connected with a great fact, a great political fact which I have referred to before,[28] the French Revolution and[29] the reaction to the French Revolution. Now what was it? I must probably repeat myself. A new type of natural right doctrine had emerged since the seventeenth century, and this doctrine was used with terrific success in the French Revolution. Don't forget that the great political events of the Western world in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries—the defection of the Low Countries from Spain and the English Civil War, including 1689—were conducted without any reference to natural rights. They were all revolts against *de facto* governments in the name of the positive law or positive fundamental law of the land. The first great political action in which in a state paper appeal is made to natural rights is the Declaration of Independence or the Virginia Declaration.

But the American Revolution did not create such an uproar in the Western world altogether as the French Revolution, for very obvious reasons: there was much more fireworks, and much more guillotining going on there than here. Now the impression which people derived from this, people who had forgotten that there is another possibility of natural right doctrine, was: Look [at] what natural right means. It means explosion, social instability, and violence, and so on. In other words, it was somehow taken for granted that natural right doctrine implied an appeal to nature, to natural rights against the established order, and that means necessarily a ruthless and possibly violent break with the past. The attitude which suggested itself as reasonable was then called "conservatism." You know, the term "conservatism" appears only in the early nineteenth century. Now what does that mean? It means such things as "the good is the old," or if not exactly the old,[30] there must at least be continuity with the old: slow change, evolution, reform as opposed to revolution. One form of this is *no natural rights*, but rights of Englishmen.[xv] Now later in the nineteenth century, especially on the European continent, these other things which were opposed to natural rights were called historical rights, namely, rights which had grown up in particular countries in a large number of generations, and they purportedly were politically and socially much sounder than natural rights.[xvi]

Investigations in the social sciences remain somehow blind and dumb. Think of a man who knows everything about socialized medicine except whether it is good or bad. What does he know about socialized medicine? So if someone knows everything about democracy except whether it is good or bad, or in what respects it is good and in what respects it is bad, he knows nothing about it. Therefore this question and this concern with "history," whatever that may mean. Now I appeal to whatever you might understand by "history," for the precise analysis is a very difficult problem. This was the great force which superseded natural right in the nineteenth century. Even [more] so with the most revolutionary movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Marxism, which rejects of course natural right as much as the conservative people of today do and in the name of the same principle: history. The conservatives differ from the Marxists, but it is the same principle in both cases: the rejection of natural right.

It seems to me that for a better understanding of the issue of natural right as it presents itself today, we must understand the issue first raised by the French Revolution, because only then did

[xv] *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), see n. viii above.
[xvi] What follows is marked "6B-7A" in the transcript.

natural right become an issue. The American Revolution did not make natural right an issue because it did not create this heart-burning. Most people, at least most people who had no selfish bias one way or the other, accepted the statement of the Preamble of the Declaration of Independence as obviously true. I mean, the divine right of kings people were dead a long time ago; it was elementary. But the French Revolution creates a problem. Now where do we find that? And that is very simple. There was a great duel fought around 1793 by an adherent of the French Revolution and the most emphatic opponent of the French Revolution: that was Thomas Paine on the one hand and Edmund Burke on the other. I think that by understanding this issue we can see both: we can understand what we may call the practical bankruptcy of natural right in the nineteenth century, and we can also understand why this led ultimately to these difficulties[31] which we are [in] today.

I will then start with a discussion first of Paine's and then of Burke's position. And I will use this also as the beginning of a discussion which is meant to help those of you who have to teach later the so-called "isms" course consider how one could build up this course. I don't mean of course that this is the only way of doing it, but this is one type of way[32] one could do it. I will build up my course as follows. I will speak of Paine and of Burke first. Now the position of these two men can provisionally be described as follows: Paine is an extreme exponent of the modern natural right doctrine; Burke on the other hand is a defender of the older understanding of natural right, the premodern understanding. The link is very obvious. Burke, being born and raised in Dublin, had some access to Thomistic literature, so Burke really had read Suárez,[xvii] perhaps the most famous commentator on St. Thomas Aquinas in the early seventeenth century, and that means practically Thomas Aquinas. But that was linked up with another issue which is politically more hot, one could say, than this theoretical question. Paine was a passionate and extreme democrat; Burke was a passionate opponent of democracy. And the issue of democracy and antidemocracy in the nineteenth century is well stated on this level.

The important point from a theoretical point of view is the following[33]. While Burke on the one hand simply restates an older kind of natural right doctrine, say, the Thomistic, he has in his doctrine the germ of the decay of that doctrine in a more subtle way than you would find it in Paine. In other words, Burke is both the last great Thomist of the European sphere [and] the first representative of what presently is called the historical school. I will explain this later. Now what happened later? I mean, what happens after Burke opposed the French Revolution violently? There came a man in the nineteenth century who accepted *democracy*, modern democracy, on Burkean grounds, and . . . that is Tocqueville. Read his *Democracy in America*, a book which was written around 1835.[34] Tocqueville's position is not identical with that of any democrat of today. Tocqueville has one great advantage over all the later democratic thinkers of whom I know, because he saw the dangers to democracy, the dangers inherent in democracy, perhaps more clearly than any other democratic writer.

But digressing for one moment regarding that proposed "isms" course: it might be possible, perhaps, to go on from here and discuss John Stuart Mill . . . and John Dewey's position today. I don't believe that I will have time for that. But I turn now to the other extreme.

[xvii] Francisco Suárez (1548-1617), *Metaphysical Disputations* (1597); on natural law, *De legibus* (1612).

There is an extreme perversion of Paine. Be satisfied with the sober, middle-of-the-road position of Tocqueville. The most extreme form of that position is, without any question, M—not here "M for Murder,"[xviii] but for Marx. And if we look now at the other extreme—there is an extreme of democracy and there is an extreme of aristocracy, which . . . through the accident of name-giving begins with an "N"—and who is that? Nietzsche. In other words, I believe [that] if one understood these five positions, one would know much more about the issue of democracy, communism, and fascism than if you would read fifty or a hundred newspapers or a hundred volumes of newspapers, and that is I think the most important point of such men. So I will now turn to Paine's position. You will recognize that there are certain points in Paine's doctrine which are common to all natural right doctrines. I read from the *Rights of Man*:

"The error of those who reason by precedents drawn from antiquity, respecting the rights of man, is, that they do not go far enough into antiquity. They do not go the whole way. They stop in some of the intermediate stages of a hundred or a thousand years, and produce what was then done as a rule for the present day. This is no authority at all. If we travel still further into antiquity, we shall find a direct contrary opinion and practice prevailing; and if antiquity is to be authority, a thousand such authorities may be produced, successively contradicting each other: But if we proceed on, we shall at last come out right; we shall come to the time when man came from the hand of his Maker. What was he then? Man. Man was his high and only title, and a higher cannot be given him."[xix]

So here we see one element of the whole, of the whole of any natural right tradition and of any natural right doctrine, and that is the opposition between nature and precedent serving as authority. The primary orientation as authority for man, by which I mean not only the orientation of primitive man but of us today, is *precedent*. In every political argument it is perfectly legitimate and necessary in this country to stop at the American Constitution as authoritatively interpreted by the Supreme Court, if it is so interpreted. In former times[35] the analogon of the American Constitution was not susceptible of any possible amendment—you know, there was no possibility of amending the fundamental order; it was simply the wall against which you came in every political discussion. There was something presupposed as final, something posited. Why? It was authority and antiquity: the old, the good old things, the good old right—that was the highest standard. Natural right in every form is based on the premise that this is impossible, that it is impossible to leave it at that. Antiquity or precedent may be sufficient in most practical cases, but can never be *theoretically* sufficient because this question is inevitable: It is tradition, yes, but is it a *good* tradition? That is the beginning. Paine links up in a very old-fashioned way the notion of natural right with authority. Natural right of course is not authority in the ordinary sense of the term, but Paine says nature is the highest authority because if antiquity is of any significance as a standard, as a proven good, then the oldest antiquity is of course much better than more recent antiquity. Now what about the Norman conquest? That was yesterday. Go back to creation: that is antiquity, and that means that there was only nature and no human convention yet. The beginning, the creation of man is the standard from which we start. What do we find? Though it may be proved that the system of government now called "new," the French, is the

[xviii] "Dial M for Murder" (1954) is a film directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

[xix] Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*: *Being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution*, part 1, in *Collected Writings*, ed. Eric Foner (New York: Library of America, 1995), 461-62. Henceforth: *Writings*.

most ancient in principle of all that has existed, being founded on the original inherent right of man, yet as tyranny and sword have suspended the exercise of these rights for many centuries past, it serves better the purposes of distinction to call it "the new" than to claim the right of calling it "the old." The good, the perfect was at the beginning, at the beginning of man's creation in any biblical doctrine.

Now what do we learn from that, from this standard higher than any human precedents? In the first place, that all men are created equal, and therefore they have by nature equal rights. Paine doesn't say anything more specific about this than what you find in the Preamble of the Declaration of Independence. That is the same principle. Which are these natural rights? Well, let us listen to Paine himself:

"Natural rights are those which appertain to man in right of his existence. Of this kind are all the intellectual rights, or rights of the mind, and also all those rights of acting as an individual for his own comfort and happiness, which are not injurious to the natural rights of others. Civil rights [as distinguished from natural rights—LS] are those which appertain to man in right of his being a member of society. Every civil right has for its foundation some natural right pre-existing in the individual, but to the enjoyment of which his individual is not,[xx] in all cases, sufficiently competent. Of this kind are all those which relate to security and protection."[xxi]

None of us have a natural right to security, as I cannot guarantee that to myself; and therefore a civil right which guarantees my security will have to take the place of the imperfect natural right, but the civil right has the foundation in my natural right to security. The natural rights which men retain in society are:

"all those in which the *power* to execute it is as perfect in the individual as the right itself. Among this class . . . are all the intellectual rights, or rights of the mind: consequently religion is one of those rights. The natural rights which are not retained [when man enters society—LS], are all those in which, though the right is perfect in the individual, the power to execute them is defective. They answer not his purpose. A man, by natural right, has a right to judge in his own cause; and so far as the right of the mind is concerned, he never surrenders it: But what availeth it him to judge, if he has not power to redress? He therefore deposits this right in the common stock of society, and takes the arm of society, of which he is a part, in preference and in addition to his own. Society *grants* him nothing. Every man is a proprieter in society, and draws on the capital as a matter of right."[xxii]

What he means there is this. By nature I am the sole judge of the goodness or badness of my action, and also of the actions of others insofar as they concern me. But this can never give me redress of grievances, because I can't force the others, and therefore society judging for me in law courts is actually exercising my right on my behalf. To come back to the question: the natural rights are freedom of religion, freedom of speech. Another lists liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression. Now then all men are by nature equal, and that means because all men are equally men. That's the sufficient reason. No man is therefore superior to any other by

[xx] In original: "but to which his individual power is not"
[xxi] *Rights of Man*, part 1, *Writings*, 464-65.
[xxii] *Rights of Man*, part 1, *Writings*, 465. Ellipses indicate that Strauss omitted a phrase in the passage.

nature; and therefore by nature men live in a state of perfect independence and liberty. All subordination of man to man, all government of man over man is instituted by man. Again, this is the thesis of the Declaration of Independence. Men live by themselves in a state of natural liberty. In that state, where they are not yet subject to any government, they will seek society in order to satisfy their wants. No man is self-sufficient; society is therefore a natural necessity. Self-interest creates an attachment, even to other men. Thus society and civilization, as Paine says, emerge. But society and civilization are something fundamentally different from government: society and civilization are natural and not instituted by man; government is instituted. Even if government were abolished, society and civilization would still exist. Why is that so? Only in a few cases society is not sufficiently competent. To supply for these few[36] [cases], government is necessary. In other words, there are always a few good-for-nothings around, and they must be taken care of: that is the function of government. "Nearly the whole of the business [of Government] is performed by the natural operation of the parts [of society] upon each other . . . And [all] the great laws of society are laws of nature," not positive laws—laws which presuppose legislative action and therefore government. So that is the situation: man lives by nature; all government is instituted by man; and that means, in other words, by nature there is no government, but by nature there is society. More precisely, why is government needed? Paine answers that government would not be necessary were the impulse of conscience clear, uniform, and irresistably obeyed, or if men were perfectly just to each other. Government is caused by our wickedness. It is not good in itself, as society is. Government is a necessary evil. Its function is "to supply the defect of moral virtue."[xxiii] Moral virtue is unable to govern the world. The function of government is not the formation of moral virtue, but the restraint of our vices. In other words, the end of government is not virtue but freedom and security. What this means will become clearer as we go on.

The most important concern for Paine is not these things, which he regards as self-evident and not in need of any clarification, but the distinction which he is making is between legitimate and illegitimate governments, and here the issue of democracy comes to the fore. Now what is that distinction? Legitimate government, we can say, is government which is formed for the common interest of society and the common rights of man. Government, in order to be legitimate, must rest on delegated power, power delegated for the common benefit of society. So the first indication of legitimate government is then the concern with the common good, or we can also say "the rule of law." No government can be legitimate which is based on force or fraud, which means in practice on conquest or on superstition, because such government is directed toward the interest of the rulers and not the interest of the community. An illegitimate government is an assumption of power for the aggrandizement of itself.

Now let us try to understand this point. Government has arisen out of society; society comes first. This is a crucial premise which exists up into the present day in the form of the notion that we have society, then government, which is a kind of arm of society, a function of society, but the society precedes government. This is contrary to the older assumption according to which society is constituted as society by government. Government has arisen out of society, but society means the totality of the members of society. There must be a guarantee that the interests and the rights of each be considered, which means everyone must be able to contribute to the making of laws by free voting. The rule of law is not sufficient in order to make government

[xxiii] *Common Sense, Writings*, 7-8.

legitimate; only that law is legitimate which the people have made for themselves. Originally government means simply the assembly of all members of the society. In this first parliament, Paine says, every man by natural right has a seat. That is no longer feasible in a complicated society, and therefore a representative assembly is formed.

Now the next point which we have to consider is the question of the legitimacy of government. Government must be based on the sovereignty of the people. That means not merely, as I said before, that laws must be made by the people for themselves; it means also that there cannot be a higher law. "That which a whole nation chooses to do, it has a right to do."[xxiv] The nation has a right to prefer a bad or defective government to reform. What does the nation mean? The majority. But on the other hand, there are certain limitations. The majority may not impose conditions on the minority different from what they impose upon themselves. That is the only limitation on the sovereign. In the clearer language of Rousseau: The only legitimate actions of the sovereign are those which take the form of general laws.[xxv] Any limitation—for instance, if someone were to say that a law applies only to members of a particular group—is illegal. But if it has the form or character of a universal or general law, then it is legitimate if that law is enacted by the community as a whole. Another important limitation, which is elementary and yet easily overlooked, is that the sovereignty of the people means necessarily sovereignty of the present generation; because after all, if a law has been made by the sovereign people one hundred years ago, even by a democratic society, why should this not be binding now? Paine, as practically everyone else, says it is impossible. The reasoning is this. "Every generation is and must be competent to all the purposes which its occasions require. It is the living, and not the dead, that are to be accommodated. When man ceases to be, his power and his wants cease with him."[xxvi] In other words, sovereignty of the people means sovereignty of the present generation. The people are constituted by the individuals entering into agreement with each other to produce a government. That compact by which government is established, the compact among the individuals, defines the form of government, the degree of power to be delegated to the parts, [the] mode of election, and so on. In brief, the compact is the constitution.

And then another crucial thesis of Paine's: the constitution is necessarily antecedent to government. In order to be legitimate, the governmental power must have been actually delegated by the sovereign people. The *act* of delegation, which means other than the specification of the delegation, that is the constitution. Therefore, the constitution is necessarily antecedent to government. The constitution governs the government. The constitution is something which must be capable of being produced or being shown: a book, a booklet. The British don't have a constitution according to Paine, because no one can produce the British constitution. That was one of the issues between him and Burke. Burke said there is a British constitution, and Paine said there is no British constitution—a controversy going on in a slightly modified way up to the present day.[xxvii]

[xxiv] *Rights of Man*, part 1, *Writings*, 438-39.
[xxv] *On the Social Contract*, book 2, chap. 4.
[xxvi] *Rights of Man*, part 1, *Writings*, 438.
[xxvii] And into the twenty-first century. See, e.g., Vernon Bogdanor, *The New British Constitution* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2009).

So we can summarize this part of the argument by saying that legitimate government is constitutional government, but in the precise sense that there is a constitutional document specifying the powers delegated, the form of delegation, and so on. Furthermore, legitimate government is, as we have indicated, the rule of law; and that means now, given the sovereignty of the people, the primacy of the legislature. The executive is only executing the laws and is therefore in thought secondary to the legislature. The last point: legitimate government is government by election. Given a certain size of the community, the whole community cannot legislate for itself any more, and there is need for a representative legislature. The legislature must be chosen from the whole body and for short periods of tenure; otherwise, the separate interests of politicians will develop and therefore constitute a kind of undemocratic feature. They must remain always citizens and indistinguishable from citizens. Legitimate government is government by election and representation, as opposed to hereditary succession—that is the great crime in Paine's eyes. Monarchies and aristocracies are, as he says, by their nature tyrannical, because the powers are independent of the people. They do not owe their existence to the people. He makes the more specific criticism of the ancient order, monarchical or aristocratic order, by pointing out the absurdity of supposing hereditary competence. He says that no one expects children of mathematicians to be mathematicians; for the same reason it is absurd to suppose that political wisdom is hereditary in a certain class or family. Government by election and representation is legitimate not only because it is based on the popular will but also because it offers the only possible guarantee of being good government. In other words, Paine knows that the absence of violence is not sufficient to guarantee legitimacy. There must also be some pipeline bringing in wisdom to secure good government. To which Paine argues as follows: hereditary government is based on the manifestly absurd assumption that competence is hereditary. I will enlarge on this next time. I would like to say only this. This doctrine of government and of legitimacy corresponds, according to Paine, to the simple voice of nature and of reason. That is important for the following point: that here a particular political scheme, that of liberal, democratic, representative government, is the universally valid demand of nature and/or reason. It was this particular understanding of natural right which was attacked successfully in the nineteenth century and which, given the state of knowledge or ignorance at hand, led to the abandonment of natural right altogether.

But I must emphasize right now that this is a particular feature of modern natural right, this notion that nature and/or reason is capable of giving a solution, valid universally, of the political problem. There is presently a term for that view: natural constitutional law. This is the notion that there is a natural law which prescribes the general character of the right kind of constitution. Half of that would be that there must a written constitution, or at least a produceable constitution, an explicit delegation of power to the government by the sovereign people; otherwise it cannot be legitimate. In the traditional natural right doctrine, that notion did not exist. It was taken for granted that there is a variety of fundamentally different solutions to the political problem which depend on the circumstances of the country and the time. We will take this up when we come to Burke.

Student: Question regarding the significance of the term "natural right" and the origin of the term.[xxviii]

[xxviii] As noted by the transcriber.

LS: Natural right is the older term. Originally, the term "natural law" would have been in Greek a kind of paradox, because "law" and "convention" being the same word, [*nomos*], you would have had "natural convention," for instance. Natural law came into some use in Plato and became a rather common term later. Natural right and natural law were synonymous terms through the ages, but in the seventeenth century, chiefly through Hobbes, a distinction: natural right is a right which man has to something; natural law is the rule which limits man. One could say that natural law is the right "which has man," whereas natural rights are those "which man has." In continental European thought they make the distinction between objective and subjective right. Objective right is the code of law, the law which binds everyone. The right in the subjective sense is the right which individuals, also groups or such combinations, have. Now in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, this is what happened. The emphasis shifted from the code, from the order, the obligations and duties, to the subjective rights of the individual as the starting point of the whole political structure. This was not an accidental change in terms.[xxix]

Now this issue which we are discussing, the final act in the drama of natural right, is really dramatized by the duel between Thomas Paine and Edmund Burke. In this duel, Thomas Paine represents the modern natural right doctrine and Burke fundamentally the older notion of natural right, the premodern one. But this must be understood with a qualification, because Burke is both the last famous premodern natural right speaker and the first member of the historical school, we could almost say. I speak first of Paine, and I have to repeat a few points I made last time. Now Paine, starting the way that all natural right teachers have started, appeals from the old or ancestral to the natural. Now what does he find by going back from human institutions or conventions to what nature says or reveals? He finds that all men are by nature free and equal, which means they have equal rights. This being the case, government must be a human institution. This is obvious. If men are by nature unequal, there are by nature superiors and inferiors, and there is a natural form of government. An example of this is paternal rule. Government is different from society: society is natural; government is instituted. The need for government is very limited and as it were marginal. Unfortunately, all people do not always respect the rights of others, and but for this unfortunate fact government would never be necessary. That government is necessary means that subordination is necessary; and therefore inequality, and instituted inequality. Natural rights are modified by the fact that government, civil society proper, comes into being. Certain natural rights are fully preserved; others are modified. Fully preserved are what Paine calls the rights of the mind: freedom of religion, freedom of speech. Somewhat qualified are the rights of self-preservation and so on, because these things have to be regulated. There must be some forms of self-defense which cannot be allowed or may be allowed, and similar conventions applying to property. Natural right remains the basis of these civil rights. Natural right determines the difference between legitimate and illegitimate government, or between genuine government and tyranny.

I mentioned the most important features of legitimate government. Legitimate government is directed toward the common good as distinguished from the good of the part, and furthermore it must be delegated by the people. It must be based on consent as distinguished from force or fraud. There is obviously a connection between these two criteria: the common good and delegated by the people. The people delegate power for their good. If someone or a group usurps power, they can be assumed to have usurped it not for the common good but for their own good.

[xxix] The transcriber notes: "Further questions deleted: returning to the text of the following lecture."

“The people” is of course an ambiguous term. It is defined precisely on the basis of natural right; namely, that the people must be the democratically constituted people, for the simple reason that everyone is equal by nature to everyone else. The government thus instituted is merely commissioned by the people. As Paine says, government by itself has no rights. The so-called rights of government are altogether duties, the implication being that the opposite is true of the people. The people have no duties, they have only rights. That means the sovereignty of the people. The people may do as they please, with one limitation: the actions of the people must take the form of laws. In other words, the sovereign people assembled cannot say: We want to kill or exile this individual. That is impossible. They must make a law, e. g.: Whoever does these and these things will be killed, exiled, or so on. That limitation, Paine believes, following Rousseau, is sufficient.

The sovereignty of the people means of course the sovereignty of the present generation. That incidentally was implied in the notion of sovereignty from the very beginning, from Hobbes on. If the sovereign, the present sovereign, is bound by the acts of previous sovereigns—previous generations of the people or previous kings—he is not fully sovereign. Sovereignty then means sovereignty of the present, the living. The delegation of power to government must take place in an explicit and well-defined form: that means a constitution. That is the meaning of the thesis that legitimate government is constitutional government. That means not only that there are limitations to the power of the government, as you had it in a medieval monarchy, for example, but there must be an explicit delegation of power which makes perfectly clear in a legally tangible manner that the source of all authority is the people.

Within the government there is a distinction between the legislative and the executive—the only powers with which Paine is concerned, to my knowledge—and he calls clearly for the supremacy of the legislative. The legislative ought to take on the character of a representative assembly; in other words, not direct democracy, if for no other reason than that only [in] this way can you have societies of a large size which are not limited to one city. The proper type of illegitimate rule for Paine is hereditary authority, meaning authority not derived directly from the people. His argument in favor of representative democracy is of a twofold kind. In the first place, it is based on natural right. Only representative democracy is just, meaning it preserves the right of each. The second consideration is of an entirely different nature: only representative government is good. Paine tried to prove this in the following manner. The only guarantee of good government according to Paine is government by elections and representation. In the first place, by such government the knowledge available in all parts of the community is shared, which it would not be if you had a king with his court. Furthermore, since every opinion available in the community will be heard, wise opinion is sure to be heard. In the other type of community, there is no necessity of this kind. Furthermore, in such a democracy, government is everyone’s business: everyone is concerned with government, and that leads to a diffusion of knowledge of political matters throughout the community. Government ceases to be a mystery. There is no government by cabinet. It is always in the interest of a far greater number of people in a nation to have things right than to let them remain wrong. When public matters are open to debate and the public judgment free, it will not decide wrong[ly] unless it decides too hastily. Now this whole doctrine of legitimacy and illegitimacy, constitutional government and so on, is meant to correspond to the simple voice of nature and of reason. That is not, in other words, a positive law of a given country or the theory of a particular positive constitution, but is the voice of nature and reason.

Student: Question regarding the understanding of Paine's thought that the end of government is not virtue.[xxx]

LS: [LS quotes from Paine to the effect that][xxxi] government would not be necessary "were the impulses of conscience clear, uniform, and irresistibly obeyed."[xxxii] ". . . [render the obligations of law and government unnecessary while they remained] perfectly just to each other . . . "[xxxiii]

Government is caused by our wickedness, which means that government is not good in itself, as society is, but naturally evil. The function of government is to supply the defect of moral virtue. Moral virtue is not present, or insufficiently present, and the defect of that is to be supplied by government, not by producing virtue but by punishing or restraining the wicked. Moral virtue is unable to govern the world, he says; therefore punishment must be applied. The function of the government is to restrain our vices. The end of government is freedom and security, but not the promotion of virtue. This is implied, although he does not say it explicitly.

Student: [. . .]

LS: [LS indicates that Paine is not a very clear theoretical thinker, but there is a much longer argument made by much sounder thinkers behind Paine, e.g., Montesquieu, concerning why political liberty rather than virtue should be the end of government, the objective of government.][xxxiv]

To go on from here, the basis of the governmental structure is the legislative as distinguished from the executive. Primarily, executive means execution of the laws. What about the other part of the executive function, what Locke had called the federative power, the function of government in regard to foreign affairs? The French Constitution says that the right of war and peace is in the nation. Where else should it reside but in those who are to pay the expense? He is thinking not only of taxes but of blood, of course. That power of war and peace rests in the legislative and not in the executive. Why? There is a reason behind this which Paine indicates.

"Why are not Republics plunged into war, but because the nature of their Government does not admit of an interest distinct from that of the Nation? Even Holland, though an ill-constructed Republic, and with a commerce extending over the world, existed nearly a century without a war: and the instant the form of Government was changed in France, the republican principles of peace and domestic prosperity and economy arose with the new Government; and the same consequences would follow the same causes in other Nations."[xxxv]

I mention in passing that this was written in 1791. Remarkable foresight! Now the reasoning is this. War has its root in monarchy, or aristocracy. No kings, no wars. Republics are essentially

[xxx] As noted by the transcriber.
[xxxi] As noted by the transcriber.
[xxxii] *Common Sense*, *Writings*, 7.
[xxxiii] *Common Sense*, *Writings*, 7. The text in brackets is in the original transcript.
[xxxiv] As noted by the transcriber.
[xxxv] *Rights of Man*, Conclusion, *Writings*, 539.

peaceful. All the monarchical governments are military. In other words, in the long run there will be no need for foreign policy and federative powers to speak of. The origin of kingship is pride, the desire to be more and to have more than the others; and that of course leads to conflicts. Conflict, however, is not necessary because pride is not necessary. Man is not the enemy of man but through the medium of a false system of government. In other words, if we did not have a false medium of government, man would be the friend of man. There would be no conflicts. Conflict is accidental and due to an avoidable error in the construction of civil society. By nature, man is not the enemy of man; man's wickedness is due fundamentally to a false system of government. This reminds us of the famous thesis of Rousseau that man is by nature good. Man, were he not corrupted by government, is naturally the friend of man; and human nature is not of itself vicious, which means there are no natural rules of viciousness. Viciousness comes in only by accident.

Of course a question arises: What about the kings? Are they not human beings, too? But the point is this: Whatever may be true of kings, the people, the common people, are good. They are good and therefore they can safely be trusted not only with government but also with the abolition of war. Can it be possibly supposed that if government had originated in a right principle and[37] [did] not [have] an interest in pursuing a wrong one, the world would be in the wretched and quarrelsome condition we have seen it [in]? What inducement has the farmer while following the plow to lay aside his peaceful pursuit and to go to war with a farmer of another country? What inducement has a manufacturer—what is dominion to him or to any class of men in the nation? Does it add an acre to any man's estate, or raise value and so on? War is the pastime of the government, of kings and their followers, not of the people. That is an essential condition of Paine's whole argument. Only because he is certain that if we have the right construction of civil society there won't be any danger of wars can he say that government will be required only in a few cases.

Let me summarize the argument up to this point. All men are by nature equal. They have by nature equal rights. That is one crucial condition, but the other, equally important of course, is that they are by nature good. All wickedness and injustice is the product of conventional inequality. Now this argument is not quite sufficient. To take a simple aspect of it, Paine's argument as seen from one of the quotations is that republics, as distinct from monarchies, are peaceful and just. But do not the examples of the ancient republics, the republics of antiquity, show first that republics are not always peaceful, and second, that the people are not always sufficiently just and wise to be concerned with the freedom and the security of everyone? We must see how Paine meets this issue. From "Common Sense":[xxxvi]

"I cannot help being sometimes surprised at the complimentary references which I have seen and heard made to ancient histories and transactions. The wisdom, civil government, and sense of honor of the states of Greece and Rome, are frequently held up as objects of excellence and imitation . . . Could the mist of antiquity be cleared away, and men and things be viewed as they really were, it is more than probable that they would admire us, rather than we them. America has surmounted a greater variety and combination of difficulties than, I believe, ever fell to the

[xxxvi] In the transcript: "From *Common Sense*." This must refer not to Paine's famous work *Common Sense*, but to Paine's signature "Common Sense," at the end of part 5 of *The American Crisis*, "Common Sense, Lancaster, March 21, 1778." In *Writings*, 176.

share of any one people . . . The Grecians and Romans were strongly possessed of the spirit of liberty but *not* the *principle*, for at the time that they were determined not to be slaves themselves, they employed their power to enslave the rest of mankind . . . We [people of the United States—LS] have equalled the bravest in times of danger, and excelled the wisest in construction of civil governments."[xxxvii]

Antiquity possessed the spirit of liberty but not its principles, which means they were concerned with freedom but not with freedom for all. We stand now on a peak. There is a radical difference between ancient republics and modern republics. We know something which the ancients did not know. In other words, progress, a decisive progress, has taken place. For this reason, any inferences from earlier republics to modern republics are false. Now this progress is shown according to Paine as the real modernity by the inferiority of the English Revolution of 1688 to the French Revolution. The rights of man were imperfectly understood at the English Revolution, but within this hundred years they became perfectly understood. Revolutionary France, as distinguished from revolutionary England, is enlightened. And there is a radical difference between the American and French revolution, which he takes together, and all earlier revolutions.

"What were formerly called Revolutions, were little more than a change of persons, or an alteration of local circumstances. They rose and fell like things of course, and had nothing in their existence or their fate that could influence beyond the spot that produced them. But what we now see in the world, from the Revolutions of America and France, are a renovation of the natural order of things, a system of principles as universal as truth and the existence of man, and combining moral with political happiness and national prosperity."[xxxviii]

Now that is only one of a large number of statements of famous contemporaries, that an entirely new type of politics had made its appearance with the French and to a certain extent with the American Revolution. I think it is of some importance for our understanding of things today. You see, when people speak today of "ideologies," they mean something like this. And yet it is perfectly clear that new political actions guided by principles of this kind and with this proviso are a very novel thing. For example, a revolution takes place, like the Dutch revolt against the Spanish, and in the name of the old right of the Dutch which the Spanish king had sworn to uphold and didn't uphold. That is obviously something entirely different from this kind of revolution, the American and still more the French one. We will come back to that when we speak of Burke, because Burke had expressed the fundamental difference in almost the same language as Paine but more forcefully, I believe. The difference is there. Or to take another contemporary of the French Revolution, Hegel, who said that in the French Revolution man had for the first time tried to stand on his head. Hegel has a quaint way of explaining himself; that was not meant merely negatively. For the first time, man had tried to order his political affairs perfectly rationally, whereas in all former times nonrational principles had qualified the rational principles.

So what then is this novel principle of modern times which became victorious for the first time in the American and French Revolutions, and which guaranteed to Paine that from now on political

[xxxvii] *American Crisis*, part 5, in *Writings,* 168-69.
[xxxviii] *Rights of Man*, part 1, Conclusion, *Writings*, 537.

and moral happiness will begin in the world? Wars will not be necessary, foreign policy will become insignificant, and therefore this little government will be sufficient. What is behind that cloak? The theme of Paine was taken up by Hegel, really, who expressed the difference between classical republics and modern constitutional states as follows: that classical antiquity knew only of the freedom of some, whereas in the modern world the freedom of all is recognized. In modern times, man as man is free. Hegel traced this fundamental change to Christianity, which had discovered the infinite value of the soul of every man.

The question which we have to raise is this: Is this Paine's understanding of the superiority of modern republics? Does Paine trace the superiority of modern republics to Christianity? . . . In order to find out what Paine's attitude towards Christianity is, one has to turn to a writing, *The Age of Reason*, the last writing of Paine. The thesis may be summarized in the following manner. According to Paine, Jesus, "this virtuous reformer and revolutionist,"[xxxix] preached most excellent morality and the equality of man. But does this mean that Paine's teaching is itself [of] Christian inspiration? No, because Christian morality, the morality of Jesus more precisely, is not superior according to Paine to that of Confucius or to the morality of the best pagans of antiquity. In fact, the morality of Jesus is identical with the natural dictates of the conscience, and that is nearly the same in all religions and all societies. The New Testament teaches nothing new upon these subjects. But the teaching of Jesus, which is perfectly all right although in no way original, is one thing; the teaching of the New Testament is another thing. *The Age of Reason*, by Paine, was written against the New Testament explicitly. In the preface of the second part, written over a year later, he says: "If I have erred in anything, in the first part of *The Age of Reason*, it has been by speaking better of the Bible than it has deserved."[xl] That gives an idea of his spirit. What is that spirit? The religion of the Old Testament, in the first place, is explicitly called a forgery. The same is applied to the Christian faith itself. Paine contrasts the God of creation with the imagined God of the Christians. Revealed religion as such is human priestcraft.

I don't want to bother you and bore you with the details of Paine's biblical criticism, which is in no way novel but just a popular restatement of what men like Hobbes and Spinoza had said before. Paine goes beyond Hobbes and Spinoza, at least beyond what they explicitly say or write, by rejecting not only the faith of the Bible, the theology of the Bible, but biblical morality as well. Yet, while Paine is antibiblical and, more significantly, anti-Christian, he is not an atheist. He criticizes Christianity in the name of the true concept of God, of what he calls Deism. Now what is Deism? We have it here, straight from the horse's mouth: "The true Deist has but one Deity; and his religion consists in contemplating the power, wisdom, and benignity of the Deity in his works, and in endeavoring to imitate him in everything moral, scientifical, and mechanical."[xli]

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[1] Deleted "is --."
[2] Deleted "for."
[3] Deleted "This is."
[4] Deleted "that."

[xxxix] *The Age of Reason*, part 1, *Writings*, 671.
[xl] Strauss apparently cites this sentence from memory, or slightly alters the original. In the original: "If I have erred in any thing, in the former part of the Age of Reason, it has been by speaking better of some parts than they deserved." *The Age of Reason*, preface to part 2, *Writings*, 733-34.
[xli] *The Age of Reason*, part 1, *Writings*, 703.

[5] Deleted “the.”
[6] Deleted “that,”
[7] Deleted “but they are not essentially”
[8] Moved “as that older doctrine.”
[9] Deleted “was.”
[10] Deleted “this question”
[11] Deleted “was.”
[12] Deleted “between.”
[13] Deleted “would it not be.”
[14] Deleted “and that.”
[15] Moved “is.”
[16] Deleted “urges.”
[17] Deleted “but.”
[18] Deleted “That.”
[19] Deleted “he says.”
[20] Deleted “was.”
[21] Deleted “an atomist”
[22] Deleted “for.”
[23] Deleted “can --.”
[24] Deleted “of.”
[25] Deleted “I see no—.”
[26] Deleted “And that has --.”
[27] Deleted “raising”
[28] Deleted “to.”
[29] Deleted “to.”
[30] Deleted “as that.”
[31] Moved “in.”
[32] Deleted “by which.”
[33] Deleted “thing.”
[34] Deleted “now then we shall discuss”
[35] Deleted “when.”
[36] Deleted “phases.”
[37] Deleted “had.”

Session 7: no date
Thomas Paine Continued

Leo Strauss: [In progress] I think there is no difference in this respect, in the finality of the assertion.

Student: Would the difference be in what they rest their assertions on?

LS: That would be one point.

Same Student: [. . .]

LS: No, Deism, one can say, implies the impossibility of revelation. Not only is revelation not certain, but it is impossible. That is point one. And number two, how then is God known? By his works. Study of nature. And this reveals God's wisdom and kindness—that's very important. And therefore, since God is known to be wise and kind, then of course morality has a guarantee. Morality is simply imitating the first God. And this imitation consists not only in being kind, that's "moral," but also in science, ["scientifical"], in understanding the work of God, and "mechanical" . . .[i]

Now just one passage:

"Some perhaps will say—Ah, but you have no word of God—no revelation!; I answer, Yes; there is a word of God; there is a revelation.

"THE WORD OF GOD IS THE CREATION WE BEHOLD; and it is in *this word*, which no human invention can counterfeit or alter, that God speaketh universally to man."[ii]

In other words, when you have a book, you don't know what priests did to that book on the way from God to you, but . . . But what does this mean in more simple and clear terms? The basis of Paine's position, this Deism, is natural science: the analysis of the universe and not Christianity. In one passage he says, "The just and humane principles of the revolution, which philosophy had first diffused"[iii]—philosophy, not the Bible. To come back to the main argument, if modern republics are superior to ancient republics, that's due to modern science and to nothing else. Science is however continually—that's of its essence—progressing. Therefore our knowledge of God—[by] "our" I mean Paine and his friends—is superior to the knowledge available in the past. We live in the age of reason, *the* age of reason. The world of reason continues to raise . . . somewhere. And from this there follows of course a contempt for antiquity, both classical and biblical, which leads Paine to the practical conclusion, which has had a great success, that one shouldn't study the ancient languages.

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[i] The transcriber notes that an "unintelligible question and answer" follow.
[ii] Strauss slightly alters the first sentence from Paine's original text: "But some perhaps will say: Are we to have no word of God—No revelation?" The *Age of Reason*, part 1, chapter 9, *Writings*, 686.
[iii] The *Age of Reason*, part 2, preface, *Writings*, 731.

Now to sum up the point, the modern political systems are superior to the ancient systems, thanks to the progress of science, primarily natural but also political. Now this belief in progress is of course decisive for Paine's whole attitude, and it allows him to disregard all historical experience which would contradict his main assertions. Now I will read to you only one passage about the meaning of history and progress as held by Paine:

"The opinions of men, with respect to government, are changing fast in all countries. The revolutions of France and America[iv] have thrown a beam of light over the world, which reaches into man. The enormous expense of governments has provoked people to think by making them feel [namely, the taxes—LS]; and when once the veil begins to rend, it admits not of repair. Ignorance is of a peculiar nature; once dispelled, it is impossible to re-establish it. It is not originally a thing of itself, but is only the absence of knowledge; and though man may be *kept* ignorant, he cannot be *made* ignorant. The mind in discovering truths acts in the same manner as it acts through the eye in discovering objects; when once any object has been seen, it is impossible to put the mind back to the same condition it was in before it saw it. Those who talk of a counter-revolution in France show how little they understand of man. There does not exist in the compass of language an arrangement of words to express so much as the means of effecting a counter-revolution. The means must be an obliteration of knowledge; and it has never yet been discovered how to make man *unknow* his knowledge, or *unthink* his thoughts."[v]

In other words, the absolute guarantee of progress, the absolute protection against any relapse into reaction, or however you might call it, is given by the fact that the backbone of progress is knowledge, and knowledge cannot be forgotten. And Paine was of course a very simple mind, but much greater minds, for example, Kant, had a similar notion. Kant said that this great experience of the French Revolution and what it taught mankind, that can never be forgotten again.[vi] It is important to remember that this is not an accidental pious hope of Paine, but absolutely essential for his position.[vii]

Now let us look a little bit more closely at Paine's science which is to be the basis of social progress. This science proves, as we have seen, the moral character of the first cause, namely, the kindness of God. After all, a science which could teach us the same thing about the first cause[1] [which] Melville believed to have found out about it, would not be a guarantee of social progress. Now what is that?

"As, therefore, the Creator made nothing in vain, so must it also be believed that he organized the structure of the universe in the most advantageous manner for the benefit of man; and as we see, and from experience feel, the benefits that we derive from the structure of the universe, formed as it is, which benefits we should not have had the opportunity of enjoying, if the structure so far as it relates to our system, had been a solitary globe, we can discover at least one

[iv] In original: "revolutions of America and France"
[v] *Rights of Man*, part 1, miscellaneous chapter, *Writings*, 513.
[vi] Immanuel Kant, "An Old Question Raised Again: Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing?," trans. Robert E. Anchor, in *On History*, ed. Lewis White Beck (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 147.
[vii] The transcriber notes that an inaudible question and answer follow.

reason why a *plurality* of worlds has been made, and that reason calls forth the devotional gratitude of man, as well as his admiration.

"But it is not to us, the inhabitants of this globe, only, that the benefits arising from a plurality of worlds are limited. The inhabitants of each of the worlds of which our system is composed, enjoy the same opportunities of knowledge as we do . . .

"Neither does the knowledge stop here. The system of worlds next to us exhibits, in its revolutions, the same principles and school of science to the inhabitants of their system as our system does to us, and in like manner throughout the immensity of space."[viii]

A plurality of worlds all inhabited by thinking beings, that was frequently thought in the eighteenth century.[ix] Creation shows the goodness and beneficence of the Creator. Man ought to imitate that goodness and beneficence. More particularly, the moral character of God is shown by the fact of the conscience, that repugnance we feel in ourselves to bad actions and dispositions to do good actions. These are all things created by God. If the conscience is natural, it is clearly a divine creation; and therefore if God has created the conscience he is concerned with morality. Morality has theological sanction, but "theological" does not mean in a book, but our rational knowledge of God. Apart from that, there is a direct connection according to Paine between the scientific spirit and morality. Liberality, he says, is a natural associate of the sciences. If we cultivate science we become liberal. Liberal in Paine's sense first [means][x] generous, but also in the more limited sense which it has taken on now, namely, adherence of the political principles of Paine. Now this morality connected with science is indeed radically different from biblical morality, and that's the reason why Paine rejects biblical morality. "I believe in the equality of man, and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy"—you remember a biblical quotation? But Paine goes on: "and endeavoring to make our fellow-creatures happy."[xi] Humility is out, and that is not only by silence. Paine is not a very reserved writer: he says this explicitly.

"We cannot *serve* God in the manner we serve those who cannot do without such service; and, therefore, the only idea we can have of serving God, is that of contributing to the happiness of the living creation that God has made. This cannot be done by retiring ourselves from the society of the world, and spending a recluse life in selfish devotion."[xii]

In other words, that's easy, to pray; but to help your fellow man, that's the problem.

"The doctrine of not retaliating injuries is much better expressed in Proverbs, which is a collection as well from the Gentiles as the Jews, than it is in the [New] Testament. It is there said [X.xv. 2 : I), 'If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink.' But when it is said, as in the [New] Testament, 'If a man smite thee on the right

[viii] *The Age of Reason*, part 1, chap. 15, *Writings*, 709.
[ix] In the original transcript, this sentence is in parentheses.
[x] In the transcript: "(says?)"
[xi] *The Age of Reason*, part 1, chap. 1, *Writings*, 666.
[xii] *The Age of Reason*, part 1, chap. 13, *Writings*, 712.

cheek, turn him the other also,' it is assassinating the dignity of forbearance, and sinking man into a spaniel."[xiii]

So in other words, the New Testament notion of love of man and the biblical notion of humility are incompatible with the true scientific morality. There is of course a more simple way of serving God [which] is really implied in science and its consequences, because science is the basis of technology, and how can you help your fellow men better[2] [than] by building better and bigger machines? The beneficial effects of science are the full proof of the truth of this view.

Now another consequence which I must note before we turn to a discussion: we have seen that Paine starts his political argument from a severe limitation of the powers of government. This severe limitation of the power of government is based on the premise that the abolition of war is going to come, and this hope is based ultimately on the hope of the further spread of the scientific spirit or of enlightenment. But how does this spread really function? How does it become socially effective? The scientific spirit discerns the basis of morality according to Paine in self-interest; and now we are really talking turkey, if I may say so, because the conscience is not ultimately so very important: self-interest is. Regarding self-interest, there is great difference between enlightened and unenlightened self-interest. Enlightened self-interest leads to the peaceful exchange of goods and services: commerce. Commerce is the pacific system, ever operating to cordialize mankind. It will extirpate the system of war. Commerce improves the condition of both the buyer and the seller, apparently equally. The idea of having navies for the protection of commerce is delusive: it's putting the means of destruction for the means of protection. Commerce needs no other protection than the reciprocal interest which every nation feels in supporting it. It is common stock. It exists by a balance of advantage to all. And the only interruption commerce needs is from the present uncivilized state of governments,[3] which it is common interest to reform.

In other words, the whole system presupposes not only science, which it clearly does, but also commerce as the dominating spirit of society. That is of course prepared by a development more than a hundred years prior to Paine, and the most important theoretical statement of this view is found in Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws*[4]. I do not know whether Paine had read it, even, but that was in the air. But the crucial point, as one could perhaps[5] state the thesis of Montesquieu, is that commerce is a much better means for getting the right kind of society than virtue is. Certainly that is the consequence in Paine. We can also say that commerce, the complete commercial system, is a mechanism. A mechanism: no concern with the common good as an operating factor, but a mechanism whose effect is humane. In other words, that's much better than to have humane interests; they would be passing winds. But if you have such a system where the whole humanity is based on the solid and low ground of self-interest, then it is likely to be successful. Paine says no truly natural or religious reason can be assigned for the distinction between kings and subjects. He implies quite clearly [that] such a natural or religious reason can be assigned for the distinction between the rich and the poor. In other words, in this society there can't be any more hereditary power of any kind, but the distinction between rich and poor is legitimate and natural. Wealth does not have its origin in avarice or oppression, but its root is the freedom of the pursuit of self-interest. And some men are better at that than others—more industrious, more inventive, and so on—and this very superiority is beneficial to all, whereas the superiority in

[xiii] *The Age of Reason*, part 2, conclusion, *Writings*, 822-23.

regard to birth is of course not beneficial to all. That leads to a practical consequence which one would not expect in Paine and which was rejected by his successors shortly afterward.

"The Constitution of France says that every man who pays a tax of sixty sous per annum (2*s*. and 6*d*. English) is an elector. What article will Mr. Burke place against this? Can anything be more limited, and at the same time more capricious, than the qualifications of electors are in England? Limited—because not one man in a hundred (I speak much within compass) is admitted to vote: capricious—because the lowest character that can be supposed to exist, and who has not so much as the visible means of honest livelihood, is an elector in some places; while, in other places, the man who pays very large taxes, and has a known fair character [and so on—LS] . . . is not admitted to be an elector."[xiv]

In other words, property qualification goes without saying for Paine.

This much as a summary. Any questions before I turn to some critical remarks? Is the general character of the doctrine clear? We have first the equal rights of all. We can clarify that a little bit more by saying the fundamental right is the right of self-preservation. The right to self-preservation implies of course the right to food, and therewith for all practical purposes the right to some property. Civil society is established in order to make secure the self-preservation and the property of each. That is the only function of government; and therefore it should in no way interfere with things that are not absolutely necessary for the protection of self-preservation and property. And that means that there is no earthly reason why government should interfere with the freedom of speech and of religion. On the contrary, this freedom should be most carefully guaranteed and protected by government, because there is a connection between self-preservation and property and freedom of speech independently of the political arrangements, because by the development of freedom of speech, by freedom of science, it becomes possible to improve the self-preservation of each. The food supply, to take the most simple case, will be considerably increased by technological progress and so on, which presupposes freedom of discussion, science, and so on. Government is needed only in a very limited way, because men by themselves are good. That doesn't mean they are unselfish; they are of course selfish, but they do not have a natural inclination to hurt others. The hurting follows only accidentally. Man is not basically cruel, in other words, or proud, which is the same thing from this point of view. Men are easily brought to realize that it is to their self-interest to obey the law and have equal power in society—at least the mass of men, and that is sufficient for practical purposes.

Student: [. . .]

LS: No, I think that Paine still would assume, apart from the merely technical things, size—that you can't convene a hundred thousand people, whereas you can a hundred representatives of these people. It is also that he assumes that there is a kind of selection of the wiser and more public-spirited people as representatives, because if by some unfortunate accident the people would be so foolish as to choose the least respectable part of their community as their representatives, then Paine would say to this that it is such a bad assumption. I mean, as agents to ourselves, as in tax matters or other private matters, you would of course not go to a notoriously unreliable person. How can we hand over our property, life and liberty *en bloc* to some utterly

[xiv] *The Rights of Man*, part 1, *Writings*, 470.

unreliable person? So insane [is] this assumption that we can disregard it. What people will do of course will be to choose the most reasonable and most respectable man of their community as their representative. So in other words, the representative system has the great advantage of being selective, and therefore the guarantee of having wise decisions is increased if you replace direct democracy by representative democracy.

Student: Would Paine believe that there are differences in development?

LS: I don't think that he ever denies it, but he would not think that it is important, because most people are able to take care of their private interests reasonably. As Machiavelli put it, in matters of life and property most men are not altogether insane. He meant in matters of love,[xv] that's another story, but that is politically not so important. So in other words, most people can take care in a sane way of their private interests, and [6]what are social problems but, you know, a little bit more enlarged but not fundamentally different—that he assumes. People know quite well whether a certain tax is too oppressive, he would say, and even if they would not be able to invent a certain kind of new tax, they would be able to judge or whether it is good or oppressive or nonoppressive. What is needed for political knowledge can be acquired by most people easily, and if there are certain more technical matters, all right, you will find technicians for that. They must be strictly supervised, of course, by the citizen body and its chosen representatives.

Student: [. . .]

LS: His argument is very simple. Intelligence or other gifts of this kind are not inherited. If someone is a great mathematician, the chances are that his son will not be a great mathematician. And why should not the same apply to political wisdom? He would admit that some people are wiser than others, but he would say [that] you can't build a system on that. Or in other words, what he implies, as many [an]other modern democratic doctrine, and even ancient, implies, is that the undemocratic thing is not the admission of a kind of superior right of ability; the undemocratic thing is to admit a right of birth or wealth independently of ability, so that equality means not equal status for all but equal opportunity for all, as it was put. He does not enlarge upon this subject, at least in the writings of which I know, but I think something of this kind can be assumed. He was satisfied that the rejection of hereditary government and of the hereditary principle is sufficient for his purposes. In other words, he would say this: if someone is elected because of superior ability, he owes his power in fact to being elected. And that is the crucial point: that [he] is able is desirable, but that is not so crucial as that he be elected. The fact that he is elected is the guarantee, in principle, that he remains dependent on the electorate. The other one is only desirable, and no legal provision can be made for that. We can only say he had a certain general optimism that the chances that able people would be in control would be greater in a democratic than in an aristocratic or monarchical government. But that goes too far. No one is really in control in Paine's theory. The dependence of all government, including the legislative,[xvi] on the people is overwhelming, according to his plan. And without the assumption of the diffusion of sufficient common sense, the whole system wouldn't make any sense, and that he does indeed assume.

[xv] In the transcript: "(?love)"

[xvi] In the original transcript: "legislative (?)"

Student: [. . .]

LS: No. I think the only concession to this you find is that abject poverty—that should not have any political say in the community. But a farmer, even a small farmer who can pay his limited tax—that is the only politically relevant and necessary qualification. What interested him in wealth was only this, the intelligence required in acquiring wealth, rather than the social conditions . . .

Student: [I] don't understand how Paine can understand common good. All he seems to think of is individuals. There is no real community that would give government tasks for the whole community. It has only a negative aspect, that government must be prevented from doing harm to individuals.

LS: I think he would answer as follows. There is no common good strictly speaking, of course, but he would say we don't need that. Assuming that there are such goods which cannot be enjoyed by anyone except if shared equally by all, that's the only common good we need because everyone then has the same interest as everyone else in defending them. Now, for example, political liberty would clearly be such a good: I want it for selfish reasons, but I cannot possibly have it if everyone else doesn't have it, so I will fight for it for selfish reasons. But in making that fight, I fight for everyone. Or a bridge, or hospital, or a school: everyone needs it for his body or his family and so on, but he can't have it for himself if it doesn't exist for all. That, I think, would be the way in which he would try to solve that.

Student: But then government requires certain positive powers, and the whole thing could run away if he allows himself to consider that.

LS: No, he says there is no reason for that. If you have, say, fundamentally agrarian democracy and no foreign enemies—these were fulfilled in America in the eighteenth century—why do you need this? That is just a European prejudice, that you need it. You know that this played a very long role in this country, much beyond the eighteenth century.

Student: But did Paine mean that this was valid only for this country in the eighteenth century?

LS: No. With regard to foreign policy, yes. With the republicanization of the universe [from the French Revolution and its spread], he hoped[7] this great source of governmental power, war and preparation, would disappear. The other thing about which he simply did not think was that this beautiful system of commerce and technology is of course at loggerheads with simple agrarian democracy. And that competitiveness could arise from this point which would call for big government—no reflection on this point. I believe even Jefferson—his friend, you know—was fundamentally satisfied with disliking the big cities and the rabble of the big cities, and the question was whether this was not inevitable, however, apart from all external influences, on the basis of the theory itself, where such importance is attached to the commercial function of the agrarian society and to the expectations from invention, technology, and so on—whether this was not a necessary consequence theoretically. But nothing of this in Paine.

[. . .] There is some connection no doubt between his radical democracy and Marxism, there is no doubt about that. I mean, Paine would have rejected it personally, but the question is whether he has a real right to.

Student:[8] If it's true that building hospitals and roads and other things in the common interest makes possible a good kind of life for all, isn't it true that government would soon begin to pass beyond its negative functions?

LS: I added the bridges and roads . . . Theoretically there is no reason why hospitals should not be founded by private foundations. Oh, yes, I have no doubt that the scheme doesn't work, but Paine's fundamental notion is this: you have to have some policemen—well, what they called the night watchman state. That was his tendency.

Student: [. . .]

LS: This doctrine, that republics are peaceful and therefore if the whole world were to consist of republics the problem of war is solved, was the hope of Kant, too. And you remember the very strong statements at the beginning of the *Federalist Papers* against this notion with reference to the classical examples.[xvii] I don't believe it, whatever that may be worth. But in fairness, one would have to say that the experiment was never really made. You never had the whole world covered by commercial republics. That is the point the old-fashioned liberals make today, that the experiment was never made. What were these liberal states of the nineteenth and twentieth century, like Britain and France, for part of the century, and especially this country? They were a very small part of the world. So that is still an open question. And the thesis of the Marxists that capitalism is necessarily imperialism is not so simple—I mean whether that is really true. You know? There are such tendencies in capitalism, but there are also other ones.[xviii]

Well, I can only say, whatever one may think of the proposition, a simple empirical proof to the contrary is impossible, because that state of affairs has never existed. And one can of course say that is perfectly true, that a democracy which does not know slavery, modern democracy, is fundamentally different from the ancient democracies, which could be said to be aristocracies rather than democracies because of the existence of slavery. There is some food for thought here. The question is whether war does not have other roots which would be as effective in democracies as in monarchies or hereditary aristocracies. I sometimes think, from experience between the two wars in Germany, that the horrors of war appeal also to some human instinct. Let us assume that there wouldn't be any wars for three hundred years: many men would feel that some great source of human greatness had absolutely vanished. War would appear in an entirely different way. That is perfectly imaginable. You can say this remains a mere dream; that is probably true. But still there are other sources of war apart from the governmental set-ups, and even if we assume a world in which [there is] not only[9] universal democracy but also perfect satisfaction, a very high standard of living everywhere, even that would not exclude the possibility of war, except if one assumed that all wars are waged for a better standard of living—which is not a safe assumption. One can safely say that can be refuted.

[xvii] *The Federalist Papers*, nos. 6-9 (Hamilton).

[xviii] The transcriber notes that unintelligible question and answer follow.

Student: [. . .]

LS: I think the crucial vehicle of that moral progress is the constant experience of morality as understood as enlightened self-interest. Crime doesn't pay anymore, neither intranational nor international crime. Paine does not have in mind that men will become simply better men, I mean that there will be a kind of moral conversion. That would not be . . . except if this moral conversion is a mere necessary consequence of new social arrangements.

Student: [. . .]

LS: We are more enlightened than [the] ancients—that would be intelligible if we had linked it up with a certain interpretation of Christianity, [of] biblical morality altogether; that the demands of human responsibility for his fellow men have [been] increased by the biblical teaching, and this kind of thing. Nothing of that kind in Paine. The real, the novel thing is this new science, and beneficence means decisively . . technological beneficence, one could almost say, along certain lines of Locke, that the man who makes the invention of a new drug is a much greater benefactor of mankind than one who helps the poor. No, I think that moral change proper does not play a role.

Student: [. . .]

LS: No withering away of the state, no. No, no. Think that someone is suddenly [. . .] or one man falls in love with another man's wife, and so on. That will always happen. To that extent, paradoxical as it may sound, Paine was more realistic than Lenin. Lenin thought that if that happens, the whole community, because they are reasonable people, will simply take care of that case, which means in simple language: lynch job. And Paine was much too English to accept that.

Student: [. . .]

LS: There is also the statement which I read where he says the laws of society, distinct[xix] from government, are all natural laws, which is of course the invisible hand. In other words, this integration of the merely selfish wills into selfish wills [that are] socially beneficent takes place independently of the government,[10] [through] the market. The government continues to function only because there are some people who throw monkey wrenches into that beautiful thing.

Student: My point was that unless you have world government, you have a series of nations confronting each other as individuals did prior to civil government.

LS: Yes, but here again, would not the world market take on a similar function as the intranational market? The market, that is the natural law of society which antedates government and which is intrinsically good, whereas government is only a necessary evil.

Student: [. . .]

[xix] In the transcript: "distinct (?)"

LS: The question is: Why could you not have thirty or forty men meeting, say, in Paris, and fixing[11] these things as a kind of world parliament? You don't need world government. You don't have much of government in your own society; you need even less in the world society because this monkey-wrench business is what has to be taken care of by police and courts. But he refuses to speculate about it, because he never develops that.

Student: [Questioner doesn't see how, without world government, the few large republics won't do harm to the smaller.][xx]

LS: Paine's argument is based on the premise which a much greater thinker of the same school, Montesquieu, rejected, namely, that trade between nations is necessarily equally beneficent to both. You see there is really no reason for that, whereas Montesquieu shows that in certain cases trade is beneficent to one partner and not beneficent to the other.[xxi]

Let us limit ourselves to those difficulties which he brings to our attention himself. Now there is one point which can be disposed of in a few words, and that is the qualified character of the democracy which Paine discusses, the property qualification. Now of course, according to the strict democratic principle, one man one vote, the property qualification has no status. The question is: Is this argument enough? Think, for example, of the controversy regarding proportional representation or the vote of eighteen-year-olds, which I think is not controversial in this country, although I personally believe it ought to be controversial. Still, the vote of sixteen-year-olds has not yet been suggested.[xxii] Or take proportional representation. In one way or another, I mean, we admit limitations to the democratic principle. In other words, there is a principle underlying these limitations. You cannot follow the strict logic of democracy up to the point where this logic would lead you to measures destructive of democracy. I think that is the simple argument behind Paine, more clearly stated by Rousseau. Those who are forced to sell their liberty for bread cannot be truly concerned with liberty. But of course that argument is naturally not sufficient. One can rightly say in this particular case that the education of the lower strata of society beyond what was the case in the eighteenth century has altered the situation radically. So we can leave it at saying that property qualifications, while a very interesting feature in Paine's doctrine, do not affect the very principle of the whole argument. In this point, democracy of the nineteenth century may be said to have deviated from Paine in the direction of Paine's intention. On the other hand, of course there is the problem which we take up later, the distinction between the rich and the poor: this may very well be the source of conflict, and that was of course the starting point of Marxism in particular. This whole line of thought is in no way by Paine. We can leave it at that.

More interesting is the issue of freedom of religion. Freedom of religion is here seen as a natural right.

[xx] As noted by the transcriber.

[xxi] *The Spirit of Laws*, 4. 20. 23. The transcriber notes "question and answer" here but does not indicate whether it was not intelligible or not recorded.

[xxii] This was suggested in the 1990s by Nelson Mandela and has been adopted in several countries, though often with conditions.

"As to religion, I hold it to be the indispensable duty of government to protect all conscientious professors thereof ["professors" means of course not in the narrow sense of today, but those who profess the religion—LS], and I know of no other business which government has to do therewith. [Meaning not the promotion of religion is the function of government, but securing freedom of religion—LS] . . . a diversity of religious opinions . . . affords a larger field for our Christian kindness. Were we all of one way of thinking, our religious dispositions would want matter for probation.[xxiii]

That is one argument, a very strange argument, I think, in favor of toleration. Religious diversity is preferable from a religious point of view to religious uniformity. Now this means, of course, as Paine knows, freedom for religious error. There can be only one true religion, but there may be many religions which are morally good; and that is all you have to demand and that is all right. All religions by nature kind, benign, and united with principles of morality must be tolerated.

The interesting question concerns religions which are morally bad or, which is the same thing, which are dangerous to society. Just two quotes.

"The idea . . . that priests could forgive sins . . . [is] always dangerous to society."[xxiv]

"The most detestable wickedness, the most horrid cruelties, and the greatest miseries, that have afflicted the human race, have had their origin in this thing called revelation, or revealed religion. It has been the most dishonorable belief against the character of the Divinity, the most destructive to morality, and the peace and happiness of man, that ever was propagated since man began to exist. It is better, far better, that we admitted, if it were possible, a thousand devils to roam at large, and to preach publicly the doctrine of devils, if there were any such, than that we permitted one such imposter and monster as Moses, Joshua, Samuel, and the Bible prophets, to come with the pretended word of God in his mouth, and have credit among us."[xxv]

I don't go into the merits of this doctrine, but I ask you: Does not Paine destroy the very foundation of religious toleration without noticing it? That, I think, was the ultimate salvation of Paine, that he really didn't know what he was doing. I could give you many more passages of this kind. To repeat, if it is true that toleration finds its limit in morally bad doctrine, doctrine dangerous to society, a very sound principle; and if the traditional religion, the second matter,[xxvi] is dangerous to society, well, then you arrive at the communist consequence, which Paine was too muddleheaded and too good-natured [12]to draw.[xxvii] Well, the question arises: What can we do? How can one prevent that consequence? Why does Paine get into this particular fix? I believe we will dwell for a while on this question. This is of some importance. The major [premise] is: Socially subversive doctrines, socially dangerous doctrines—meaning doctrines which make people worse citizens—should not be tolerated. That's the major; now we come to the minor [premise]: But revealed religion as such has detrimental effects on citizenship. What is

[xxiii] *Common Sense*, part 4, *Writings*, 43.
[xxiv] *The Age of Reason*, part 2, preface, *Writings*, 731.
[xxv] *The Age of Reason*, part 2, 820-21.
[xxvi] In the transcript: "(?matter)"
[xxvii] The transcript reads "not to draw," but the transcriber notes in parentheses that Strauss's "(meaning must be, *to* draw)." Indeed, Strauss apparently must have meant to say "to draw."

the way out of Paine's fix? In other words, a somewhat different attitude towards revealed religion, it would seem to be. Or in other words, a somewhat different attitude towards the power of reason than Paine had. If Paine had not been so [. . .] in his Deism he would have perhaps read the Bible with somewhat different eyes.

Student: How does this first premise square with the natural right to freedom of speech and expression?

LS: You are perfectly right. There is no evidence there, and therefore I limit myself to those aspects of his doctrine where he speaks up himself. He makes this qualification only in a clause, as it were—well, of course, doctrines which are really . . . well, what you would say . . . I have no evidence, but I would say that a doctrine which would preach sodomy, for example, would have been regarded by Paine as not permissible. I don't know, but I think he would have said that.[xxviii]

This brings us to the question of the whole basis of Paine's doctrine, of his whole doctrine of democracy, of course, and not just a little merely academic affair. What is the basis of that we have seen? The belief in God, but that means ultimately natural science; and therefore the fate of this kind of doctrine depends decisively on how far natural science is a support of this democratic doctrine. Now in his time already there were quite a few men, for example, Burke's friend Condorcet[xxix]—we don't have to travel very far—who was a downright atheist on the basis of that same science, to say nothing of philosophers like Hume and Kant, who showed that on the basis of this science, this modern science, you can never establish the existence of God.

So this science then does not lead to God. God becomes—as La Grange, I think put it, was it he?—an unnecessary hypothesis.[xxx] Now what then is the basis of morality and of natural right, and therewith [of] democracy? The conscience, Paine sometimes says; but what becomes of the conscience once you accept the kind of psychology which Paine actually uses, namely, the Lockean conscience: all ideas . . . there are no innate ideas, all ideas are acquired, and so on? The conscience is bound to disappear, as it has disappeared already from Locke's doctrine. The only other principle which is discernible in Paine is enlightened self-interest. Question: Is enlightened self-interest the same for all? Is this a principle supported by that science? We heard something in the nineteenth century of the survival of the fittest, which means that the self-interest of the fit and the self-interest of the [unfit][xxxi] do not coincide. In other words, to generalize from that, this modern science is as compatible with kind as well as with unkind consequences. You have social Darwinism of various kinds. So in other words, the fundamental basis of this doctrine is so

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[xxviii] The transcriber notes: "unintelligible question and answer."

[xxix] Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794). See especially *Outline for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795).

[xxx] Pierre-Simon La Place (1749-1827), eminent French scientist, in an apparently apocryphal anecdote is reputed to have responded to Napoleon's question as to why he didn't mention God in his account of the universe: "I have no need of that hypothesis." Joseph-Louis Lagrange (1736-1813) is reputed to have commented: "That is a fine assumption; it explains many things." Wikipedia provides quite a thorough account: see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre-Simon_Laplace (#14 Religious Opinions).

[xxxi] In the transcript: "misfit."

shaken already in the eighteenth century that it is no wonder that this kind of doctrine could not maintain itself.

Particularly important, because that lingers on much longer, are the hopes which Paine had. Man is by nature good and social, government is almost unnecessary—which is taken by Paine to mean, as I read to you one passage last time, there was a perfect beginning. Man is by nature good, a kind of Adam; and evil, wickedness came in only by man's fall. And since it came by man's fall, that's the argument, it can be remedied by man again, namely, if man becomes wiser. Well, he doesn't think of the particular sin of Adam, of course, but he thinks of the sin of the great stupidity in allowing monarchy and hereditary power to arise. But the question is: Is the assumption of a perfect beginning really possible for Paine? I must read to you a few passages.[xxxii]

"The more perfect civilization is, the less occasion has it for Government, because the more it does regulate its own affairs, and govern itself."[xxxiii]

Is this perfect civilization at the beginning? Answer: No. Man becomes good only through habituation. Man's goodness appears, therefore, not at the beginning but at the end. In fact, what Paine presupposes is not the notion of a good beginning, but just the opposite, the Hobbean notion of an imperfect, bad beginning, a most imperfect beginning. That has great consequences for the political doctrine. If that is so, if the beginnings are very imperfect—as in the clear statement of Hobbes, war of everybody against everybody—the whole notion of Paine regarding society has to be revised. If man is by nature the enemy of man, as he would be either essentially, as Hobbes says, or accidentally because of scarcity, then it follows that man owes really the best to society, to the social organization, even to government. Paine does not draw this conclusion. He is in a strange way blind to this difficulty. I read to you one more passage.

"During the suspension of the old Governments in America, both prior to and at the breaking out of hostilities, I was struck with the order and decorum with which everything was conducted, and impressed with the idea that a little more than what society naturally performed was all the Government that was necessary, and that Monarchy and Aristocracy were frauds and impositions upon mankind."[xxxiv]

What did Paine observe? That the mass of the American colonists behaved in a lawabiding manner even after all law enforcement agencies had disappeared, and that revealed to him the nature of man. Would we not be equally entitled to say that they were habituated by a long tradition of law and lawabidingness, including of course government action, to behave in that way? Paine, we may say, was blind to the fact that these men were habituated by a long tradition of government, and he believes these are natural men. Paine's hopes for the future are derived not from man's nature, really, but from man's achievement in some places, from progress actually achieved. Progress achieved may justify expectation of further progress but does not prove in itself the necessity of further progress. Paine is certain, as we have seen, that a relapse or decay is impossible. Decay is impossible because oblivion is impossible. But he proves by his

[xxxii] There was a break in the tape at this point.
[xxxiii] *The Rights of Man*, part 2, chap. 1, *Writings*, 553.
[xxxiv] *The Rights of Man*, part 2, chap. 5, *Writings*, 605 (in Paine's footnote).

own self-contradiction, it seems to me, that oblivion is possible. Paine is blind to the precarious nature of civilization. This explains his belief in the sovereignty of the present generation, an oblivion of the debt to the past, or in other words, the oblivion of the possibly salutary effect of tradition. And just as his belief in the natural goodness of man is unfounded, so is his belief in the goodness of the common people as distinguished from the wickedness of kings and higher classes. There is no doubt that these hopes and delusions are necessarily connected with the theoretical principles from which they start, but they make these principles questionable. We have to take up some other points in Paine's doctrine. We can't do that today. And I will then conclude my discussion of Paine, whose doctrine is an extreme form of the modern natural right doctrine, you can almost say a caricature of it. But yet even in spite of this simplification of the doctrine, its fundamental features appear in that. From Paine I shall turn to a brief description of the general character of the modern natural right doctrine, and then discuss Burke.

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[1] Deleted "what."
[2] Deleted "but."
[3] Deleted "and."
[4] Deleted "of which."
[5] Deleted "much."
[6] Deleted "what is"
.[7] Moved "from the French Revolution and its spread"
[8] Deleted "Following up earlier one.."
[9] Moved "there is."
[10] Deleted "by."
[11] Deleted "with."
[12] Deleted "not."

Session 8: February 1, 1954
Still More on Thomas Paine

Leo Strauss: [In progress] . . . and freedom of the mind generally. Furthermore, the function of the state consists in the protection of life, liberty, and property. And this notion of the function of the state is connected with the distinction between the state, or more precisely, government and society. Society is natural. Government is instituted or established. Society as society is governed by natural law, say, like the law of supply and demand . . . and the only right attitude of the government is to keep hands off society because society is working very well if left alone—only there is some marginal need for government because there are always some people who don't behave. On the basis of this notion of the equal rights of all, Paine arrives at certain notions of what constitutes legitimate government. Legitimate government must be representative government. The government must be elected by the whole citizen body, which means democracy. Paine finds no difficulty in reconciling democracy[1] with a small property qualification. Another point which is equally essential to Paine's doctrine of society, of civil society, is[2] the need for explicit delegation of sharply defined powers to the government. This explicit delegation of sharply defined powers is the constitution. [That] only constitutional government is legitimate means, in Paine, [that] only government based on [an] explicit, and for all practical purposes written constitution can possibly be legitimate.

Furthermore, such government is in accordance with the natural rights of each, namely, a representative democracy constitution . . . defined. Only such government [that] is in accordance with the natural rights of each, let us say with the equal rights of each,[3] promises to be good government. So the government which is in accordance with natural right, the just government, is the only one which can be good.

The central part of the government is the legislature. The executive is limited to the execution of laws. Paine is silent about what Locke calls the federative power, and the reason is this: there won't be any foreign policy to speak of if the whole world has become republican, because republics need peace and war has its roots in the prevalence[i] of hereditary power in the past.[ii] The principle: man is by nature good; evil arises only out of bad institutions. At this point we are confronted by the difficulty that republics also are warlike from time to time . . . the republics of classical antiquity. To which Paine answers as follows: that they were very imperfect. There is a fundamental difference between modern republics and ancient republics. This difference is due not to the influence of Christianity. Paine rejects Christianity as a . . . and he makes a very passionate and violent attack on the Bible. The difference between modern and ancient republics is due to the Enlightenment which was possible . . . ultimately to modern natural science. But there is, apart from the direct influence of science through diffusion,[4] also a social vehicle of enlightenment, and that is commerce. So we may say Paine's full picture of the just society is not just democracy, representative constitutional democracy; it is also a commercial, technological democracy. Without the addition "commercial and technological," the whole system would not work. It is an integral part.

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[i] In the transcript: "[?]"
[ii] In the transcript: "[?]"

Now I must first indicate some difficulties of Paine's position. I believe some of it will be immediately clear, because in the meantime some of these difficulties have become evident to the meanest capacity, as they called it in former times, by the following events. First, regarding the property qualification. It is sufficient if I read you what Burke says about it in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

"The voters in the Canton [the smallest political unit in France at that time—LS],[iii5] who compose what they call *primary assemblies*, are to have a *qualification*. What! a qualification on the indefeasible rights of men? Yes; but it shall be a very small qualification. Our injustice shall be very little oppressive; only the local valuation of three days' labour paid to the public. Why, this is not much, I readily admit, for anything but the utter subversion of your equalizing principle. As a qualification it might as well be let alone; for it answers no one purpose for which qualifications are established [what he means is this: if property is to be considered, you must have much larger property qualifications—LS] and, on your ideas, it excludes from a vote the man of all others whose natural equality stands the most in need of protection and defence [and who is really poor—LS]: I mean the man who has nothing else but his natural equality to guard him. You order him to buy the right, which you before told him nature had given to him gratuitously at his birth, and of which no authority on earth could lawfully deprive him. With regard to the person who cannot come up to your market, a tyrannous aristocracy, as against him, is established at the very outset, by you who pretend to be its sworn foe."[iv]

Now that is a very strong but I think perfectly reasonable statement of Burke, and later democracy fully accepted it by abolishing all property qualifications.

The next point we have to make concerns the freedom of religion of which I spoke the last time.[v] For Paine the freedom of religion is the most sacred of all the natural rights of man, but Paine also said that the Bible contains a socially dangerous teaching, a teaching dangerous to liberty and democracy. Now is freedom of religion a practical proposition, if the Bible contains a socially dangerous teaching? Now if freedom of religion is to be maintained—and we cannot possibly doubt Paine's sincerity—one would have to reconsider the whole problem of revealed religion, which means one would have to reject Paine's argument in *The Age of Reason* completely, or else one would have to draw the consequence which the Marxists do. This however means that it is necessary to reconsider the basis, the fundamental basis, of Paine's whole thought, namely . . . his doctrine of the kind omnipotent creator which is based on natural science. This doctrine had already broken down in Paine's time, namely, that modern natural science is as such capable of being a sufficient basis for a belief in a kind and omnipotent God. This has also great consequences for Paine's moral teaching insofar as his moral teaching . . . This morality of Paine, a democratic morality, loses its rational basis in the moment reason breaks down. Only in one way can Paine still maintain, or can a Painean still maintain, Paine's moral conclusions, namely, if he says enlightened self-interest alone is a sufficient basis, without any reference to God.

[iii] In the transcript: "(?at that time)."

[iv] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1909-14). Published online by Bartleby.com, 2001), paragraph 288.

[v] In the transcript: "(?of which I spoke the last time)."

[6]Let us then try [and see] whether this would work. Let us forget about any theological doctrine and let us simply state [that] enlightened self-interest is a sufficient basis for human life, and therefore also especially for the best ordering of human life, namely, democracy. Now the question is this: Is enlightened self-interest sufficiently strong as a social bond? Is it so easy to get people to act along the lines of their enlightened self-interest? Within a very short range, it is relatively easy; I mean, most people can prevent the worst regarding bankruptcy and other things. Or as Machiavelli put it so neatly, that in matters of life and property men are not altogether insane—which is surely true, but that is obviously not sufficient for complex political issues. We have to admit the great power of stupidity.

More fundamentally stated, or in the terms in which Paine himself stated it: Is it really true that man is by nature good? Now when Paine states man is by nature good, he means of course that man in fact is not good. Man is evil. But his being evil is entirely due to evil institutions: change the institutions and man will become good. One would have to raise the question, of course: What is the root of the evil institutions, if man is by nature good? Paine says: Pride. In other words, some people want to be more than others and have more than others, and they are the wicked kings and nobles. But is this pride we locate for the time being in the kings and the nobles really such an accidental affair? Are we not likely to find it also in others? In other words, man is by nature good, which means man has a perfect beginning—as Paine says in a number of places, a kind of Garden of Eden, and so on. Yet Paine does not always use this language of the Garden of Eden; in other passages Paine speaks of the beginnings of man as most imperfect. In other words, not the Garden of Eden, but savages. And what savages: war of everybody against everybody. Nature is then not kind. Nature must be conquered; she is rather an enemy. And if this is so, that would apply to human nature as well. If nature is not kind to man, she will not be kind also to man's own original establishment, and so she will not have made him a very kind being but rather that brutish being of which Hobbes instructs. The natural consequence from that would of course be strong government: the Hobbean consequence. It does not necessarily mean absolute monarchy, as Hobbes believed, but it certainly means Hobbean sovereignty: a strong government with teeth which would counteract the natural wickedness and bestiality and pride of man. All right. To which Paine would answer as follows: When I say man is by nature good, I do not mean that there was in the origin an Adam perfectly innocent, and perfectly virtuous and wise, but I mean that man in the beginning did not have an innate desire to hurt others—that is what pride means. But man is by nature perfectible. There are no natural obstacles to man's almost infinite perfectibility. So if man has such a nature as Hobbes [says] at the beginning, this nature can be changed. You may need for some time a Hobbean government to get some sense and decency into man, but later on, after we have brought it into him, he doesn't need it any more maybe. In other words, men can gradually create conditions in which men cannot but be good.

Still we would say: All right, but there might be the danger of relapse into the old Adam.[vi] Now that is excluded according to . . . It is impossible to forget these great insights which man has gained. We could say here Paine is blind to the precarious character of civilization which he is forced to admit: an imperfect beginning, an enormous effort needed to get men out of that original savagery, and yet the certainty that man will never fall back into that, and civilization

[vi] In the transcript: "(Adam?)"

does not remain precarious even in the most advanced stages because of this beginning. I'll restate this in the following way. Man is not by nature good in the ordinary sense of the term. He becomes good by civilization. And in fact Paine admits that: he becomes good by civilization, by the civilizing process. If this is so, man owes his bent[vii] not to nature but to the human past,[viii] to the human life[ix] and past. That is inevitable for Paine to admit. But in spite of that Paine teaches the sovereignty of the people, in the sense of the sovereignty of the present generation, which means the contempt for the past and for the tradition. Yet it was the tradition which made man tolerably good.

Student: Does Paine simply contradict himself [regarding] whether man is good or isn't?

LS: To put it a bit more precisely, it amounts to the same thing, what you say. What is the beginning? Is the beginning a perfect Adam in the Garden of Eden? . . . You know the traditional notion of Adam as stated[x] by theology . . . that Adam was created perfect, and perfect means fully virtuous, fully wise, to say nothing of the supernatural graces. But he lost his [status][xi] by the Fall. That was the traditional theological teaching.[xii] Paine sometimes speaks in that vein. But there are also passages in which he admits a fundamentally Hobbean notion of the beginning, namely, a very imperfect beginning. You can also state it as follows, and that was the way in which Paine would try to get out of that, just as [would] Marx. He would say: Of course Hobbes is right, a very imperfect beginning. But why was it imperfect? Hobbes says [it is] because there is something deeply[xiii] in man: pride, the desire to have more and be more than others, a desire which is wholly irrational but very strong. Keep[ing] up with the Joneses is the most everyday manifestation of this thing. But one could argue as follows, deviating from Hobbes: Well, why is man such a beast to man in the beginning? Answer: Not because they were proud, but because they were so poor. They had to fight for the small bits of food. And that would of course mean that if man is bad by nature for reasons of natural poverty, then the solution is very simple: produce, produce, produce. By that very fact you will make man good. Something of this kind is doubtless implied by Paine, but he doesn't[7] [place] any particular emphasis on that.

The next point we have to consider is the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people. According to Paine, that which a whole nation chooses to do, it has the right to do. Now what is the whole nation? That means of course [the] majority. Why? What will happen to our natural rights of each? Are we so certain that the majority will take care of that? The answer is this: No, the rule of the majority is the best safeguard of the natural right of each. Sovereignty of the people in the sense of sovereignty of the present majority is the best safeguard of the natural right of each, provided of course everyone has a right to vote, government is limited by law, and the legislative is supreme, so that the majority can express itself only in the form of general laws. That is the only guarantee according to this position—fundamentally the position of Rousseau, which Paine takes over—which makes possible the safeguarding of natural right within civil society. As Paine

[vii] In the transcript: "bent (?)"
[viii] In the transcript: "human past (?)"
[ix] In the transcript: "human life (?)"
[x] In the transcript: "as stated (?)"
[xi] In the transcript: "(basis, status??)" "Status" appears more plausible in the context.
[xii] In the transcript: "teaching (?)"
[xiii] In the transcript: "deeply (?)"

put it, the majority must not impose conditions on the minority different from what they impose on themselves. That means they can't make special laws for special groups of people or individuals, [but] always universal laws. And that was believed to be a sufficient guarantee of justice, which means, in the language of Rousseau, that the general will, the will of the community expressing itself only in the form of law, is the substitute for natural right. There is no longer a possibility and a need for appeal to natural right if a general will . . . exists and rules the community.

There are certain difficulties involved here which Rousseau clearly realized, [such as] that this is possible only in a really homogeneous society: if the society is not homogeneous, it leads necessarily to injustice. Why? First of all, what does homogeneity mean? It means what we could call economic homogeneity, not great wealth and great poverty also. It must also mean religious homogeneity and something like ethnic homogeneity. If you have stable minorities which will always be outvoted in all significant matters, the fact that these laws are phrased in general form doesn't mean anything. Then you come to the famous joke of Anatole France: the law in its impartiality forbids the rich and the poor in perfect equality to sleep under bridges and to beg in the street.[xiv] In other words, the same general law which is very incisive and helpful for some people is very unhelpful for others. Paine of course offers[xv] no reflection on this great practical problem.

But I would like to mention here only one great theoretical difficulty under all conditions confronting the doctrine of the general will, and that is this. Let us take a case even of a homogeneous society, and these people vote in a free assembly where everyone can freely express their opinions. They vote for the establishment of cannibalism. They understand [that] everyone—I myself will be eaten by my fellows[xvi] when I reach retirement age, and so I am perfectly willing to accept that.[8] What is that? Perfectly possible. In other words, we can put it this way. If the natural right or something of this kind[9] [is] replaced by the general will, you have no longer a substantive criterion; you have only the formal criterion of generality. And that is a very important point which I will take up later in a somewhat broader context, but you can see easily the way from here to nineteenth- and twentieth-century relativism. In the moment you replace the natural right by the general will, you leave every substantive decision to the general will, and all these fifty-five million different arrangements which the general will may be[xvii] in different societies is as good—namely, as just—as any other. You see? If you take cultural relativism of today and if you analyze it, you ultimately arrive at this Rousseau–Painean notion that in all these societies, the will of society, the general will has established this order, and there is no possible higher criterion. Now as stated today, it is a merely dogmatic assertion. As stated by Paine and by Rousseau, it still had some meaning insofar as they said (it is a long argument, which I cannot now recapitulate) that if you do not find an institutional expression for natural right it will be socially ineffective. And the only institutional implementation of natural right which comes closest to the safeguarding of natural right is the general will, meaning the decision of the citizen body where each one has one vote, which expresses itself only in the form of general law. Here was an argument, probably defective and untenable, but still of some

[xiv] Anatole France, *Le Lys Rouge* (Calman-Levy, 1894), chapter 7, 118.
[xv] In the transcript: "(offers?)"
[xvi] In the transcript: "fellows (?)"
[xvii] In the transcript: "be (?)"

respectability, whereas later on this argument decayed, disappeared; and its result, however, namely, the general will is the highest criterion, remains. That means cultural relativism.

Two more points and then we can perhaps have a discussion. The whole position of Paine can be stated as follows, partly based on what he himself says: that virtue in the old sense, or in the sense in which we still understand it, is replaced by freedom. The question is: Can this be done? This replacement of virtue by freedom works in practice only by a combination of freedom with science and with commerce—because that we have seen before. But, to quote Paine: "Commerce diminishes the spirit of both[xviii] patriotism and military defence."[xix] I don't go now into the substantive truth of this assertion; I merely argue it out on Paine's grounds. If that is so, it would provide that we must not be predominantly commercial. But if[10] [a country] is predominantly agricultural, then it is of course much more isolated from its neighbors and others, and a particular spirit of this particular society arises and a source of hostility [11][to] war.

And the last point regarding representative government: We can only raise the question regarding Paine's assertion that representative government as such guarantees good government because the most wise and intelligent and respectable people will be elected, of course. We can only say: What guarantee is there that this is really the case? And if I'm not mistaken, no one [today] would base[12] a defense of representative government on this ground. That representative government was for some time something of this kind [may be so], but studies have been made about the decline of public debate, say, in the British House of Commons in the last hundred years, which show that this had perhaps an element of truth under certain conditions but today is a questionable assertion. And in this country, one only has to remind oneself of the ordinary meaning of the term "politician" to realize that there is a problem here to which Paine did not pay any attention.

Now this is all I wanted to say about Paine's position. We can say without any hesitation that his position is extremely weak. And this is of course partly due to the kind of mind which Paine had, but it is also connected with a deeper problem, namely, with the fact that Paine's position, which is an extreme form of modern natural right, nevertheless and of course partakes of all the difficulties to which modern natural right is . . . in its character exposed. I would like to turn now to this broader question, namely, to the question of what modern natural right in its characteristic . . . But if there are any . . . questions you would like to raise regarding Paine, that might be done now.

Student: . . . that representative government would guarantee good government only if the people were enlightened. Wouldn't that depend upon the other point that you made, that he does not take[xx] into account the necessity of stupidity?

LS: Yes, sure, it is connected with that. Surely you can say that [is] an outcome of the principle "All men are by nature good," which also means all men are by nature sufficiently intelligent and public spirited. Sure, but you come back to the same difficulties.

[xviii] In original: "both of"
[xix] *Common Sense*, chap. 4, *Writings*, 42.
[xx] In the transcript: "(he does not take??)"

Student: You say here that Paine felt that freedom of religion was the most sacred of all man's natural rights.

LS: Yes.

Same Student: I find it difficult to understand that. Is that supposed to mean as opposed to man's *political* natural rights?

LS: Yes. You see, take this, for example, regarding such a most fundamental right, the most fundamental right, the right of self-preservation. That is qualified by positive law. In other words, you think you act in self-defense if you shoot someone on the Midway[xxi] at two o'clock in the morning. And he may not have the slightest intention of hurting you; you are just fearful. You are not the judge any more: the court is the judge. But in matters of religion, you may believe what you please, and the court can't judge that you must not do that.

Same Student: Yes, but then on the same ground you are also inhibited by positive law in religion.

LS: Why? There[xxii] is no established religion. That is impossible[13] [from] Paine's point of view. Every religion is permitted. You can say: Very well, if this religion, for example, establishes polygamy as a religious duty—as happened in this country—then the state can interfere.[xxiii] Paine would admit that. But[14] he would say this: That is not really religion. Religion is as religion an affair entirely spiritual. Having its basis[xxiv] exclusively in the mind and showing itself exclusively in professions of faith, let us say in speeches, in the moment specific instructions are given regarding action, then they are subject already to civil authorities. But religion as religion is merely internal, merely mental; and therefore it is the only right which cannot be affected[xxv] . . . That is what he means. And property: it is quite obvious that government, positive law interferes very much with it even if there is a natural right involved. That is what he means. The mind as mind is not subject to any sort of control. And that applies . . . to all speech, not only religion but to all other merely intellectual activities, if we can use that term.

Student: Wouldn't Paine admit at least the acceptance of the teaching of the Bible only in mind?

LS: Yes, but that is only one of his many thoughtlessnesses, if I may say so, because if Paine is right that the Bible has such a teaching that is so undesirable, how can the mental profession of biblical faith remain without consequences for the whole style of life, for action? I believe that Paine is not the only one who can be taken to task on this score. You know the whole difficulty of civil liberties as we discuss [it] today is connected with it. The line is very difficult to draw

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[xxi] The Midway Plaisance is part of the Chicago public park system and extends from Jackson Park to Washington Park alongside the University of Chicago campus.
[xxii] In the transcript: "There (?)"
[xxiii] As was the case with the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (also known as the Mormon Church). In *Reynolds* v. *United States* (1879), the Supreme Court ruled that a Utah law banning polygamy was constitutional.
[xxiv] In the transcript: "basis (?)"
[xxv] In the transcript: "(affected?)"

between mere intellectual mental processes, or let me say utter[ly] mental processes, and action. And the clear and present danger qualification is not sufficient; you must enlarge it at least considerably beyond what it was originally . . . There may be decades in which there is clear and present danger[15] which alters the situation radically, because a quantitative difference becomes a qualitative difference, and so on. Pornographic literature, and all these kinds of things. Someone might . . . a Kinsey Report.[xxvi] There are all kinds of questions . . . a purely mental exercise in itself, but it has of course very grave consequences for the readers, you know, because sometimes theories are taken seriously—and that is the point. So the line is not so easy to draw . . . A terrific problem arises: Should one tolerate a religious teaching which is detrimental, maybe fatal, to democracy? And some statements of Paine go so far as that. If indeed the Bible has taught men throughout the ages to be submissive to authority and therefore prevented the emergence of a true citizen spirit, including tyrannicide and other such things . . . if that is so, it is really not good a book in [a] democracy.[xxvii] In other words, this position can only be maintained if a somewhat different attitude is taken towards biblical religion, which of course [had] happened already and was already taken by many people in Paine's time. But we are speaking only of this position.[xxviii]

Then I will go to the broader question[16] concerning modern natural right, of which Paine's work is the most extreme expression. Now what are the characteristics of modern natural right in contradistinction to premodern natural right? I think one can enumerate five. The first is that we find in modern times, since the seventeenth century, something which we call natural constitutional right or natural public right. What does that mean? Take Hobbes's doctrine of sovereignty: when Hobbes says the sovereign has . . . rights, these and these rights necessarily, say, the right to decide which kind of teachers are permitted,[xxix] that he must have control of the army, he must be the legislative power, and so on and so on, what does it mean? That doesn't mean a formulation[xxx] of British law. Of course not, because the British law is[xxxi] the opposite in many cases. Nor does it even mean to express universal practice or custom, say, the practice or custom of all civilized nations. It means a natural law. The rights of sovereignty are natural rights of a certain kind. Human reason as such can discern that the sovereign must have these and these rights if the rights of the . . . are to be conserved,[xxxii] and so on. Or take another example. When Paine teaches only democracy is legitimate, or Rousseau teaches only republican government is legitimate, that means this is universally so, whatever the positive law of any country may say. It is a natural law, not a positive law of any kind. We may say natural constitutional right is a doctrine of legitimacy, but in this sense: that it is defined [by] what is legitimate always and everywhere. Natural constitutional right defines what is legitimate always and everywhere.

[xxvi] Alfred Kinsey (1894-1956), best known for his study of sexual behavior. He is author of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953), also known as the Kinsey reports.
[xxvii] In the transcript: "democracy (?)"
[xxviii] The transcriber notes: Questions and answers ended here.
[xxix] In the transcript: "(?to decide which kind of teachers are permitted?)"
[xxx] In the transcript: "formulation (?)"
[xxxi] In the transcript: "is (?)"
[xxxii] In the transcript: "(rights of the . . . are to be conserved?)"

To see clearly that this must differ from other types of natural right it is only necessary to remind ourselves of that earlier kind of natural right. There was no such doctrine of what is legitimate always and everywhere, because it was taken for granted [that] very different arrangements are legitimate under very different circumstances. In other words, the older doctrine, which was founded by Plato and Aristotle and transmitted to the Middle Ages, made a distinction between what is best and what is legitimate. What is the best social order is not legitimate under all conditions because under certain conditions it might be absolutely impossible, and therefore an attempt to establish it might be fatal. But the best order is possible only under the most favorable conditions. Under unfavorable conditions, under various types of unfavorable conditions, various types of imperfect social orders are the only ones which are legitimate. The only equivalent to this natural constitutional right in earlier doctrines would be the doctrine of tyranny. In other words, it was assumed in the older doctrines [that] there is a kind of flooring beneath which you can't go under any circumstances, and beneath that flooring there was tyranny. But above that, all kinds of very imperfect regimes are possible depending[xxxiii] on circumstances. What we find in modern times is a much more specific prescription as to what could be done everywhere and always in order to have a legitimate government—and which meant of course also [a] guarantee of good government. That was implied. So that is the first difference.

The second point is one which we can take from ordinary history, and that is that modern natural right is revolutionary, meaning, generally speaking it sanctioned the appeal, the practical appeal from the established order to the right order regardless of . . . Whereas the older notion of natural right was that while it is absolutely necessary for our understanding and for our intellectual guidance to transcend what is established here and now and to find out what is the true order, the natural order, the good order, or whatever you might call it, what you can do in practice depends decisively on what is prudent to do in the practical condition. In other words, you may have a very imperfect regime which could be replaced perhaps by a better regime even under the given unfavorable circumstances, but[17] the change might create such evil that it would not be responsible to take these steps. So in other words, we can say [that] the prudent loses the status which it had in former times. We can also say—I come back to that later, that is another aspect of the same thing—the doctrinaire character of modern natural right is distinguished from the prudent character of the older one.

The third characteristic is the form in which natural right is presented. When you look back to the documents of natural right in former times, natural right, we can say, was never treated as a separate discipline. The most common form, especially in the Middle Ages and early modern times, was that natural right was presented either in the context of positive law—certain statements of the Roman lawyers about natural law giving[xxxiv] the occasion for that—or in the context of theology. What is[xxxv] attempted in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was to achieve a radical separation of natural right from positive right. A radical separation. In its most classic form, natural right became a separate discipline, so much so that in universities in Protestant countries—Germany, Scotland, and so on—chairs for natural right were established. Adam Smith is I think the most famous of all English-speaking professors of natural law,[xxxvi] of

[xxxiii] In the transcript: "(depending?)"
[xxxiv] In the transcript: "giving (?)"
[xxxv] In the transcript "What is (?)"
[xxxvi] In the transcript "law (?)"

natural right. Take such a book like Hugo Grotius's book on [*The Law of War and Peace*].[xxxvii] Grotius all the time makes clear, this particular provision is a natural right provision; this one is one deliberated[xxxviii] from a kind of[xxxix] . . . international practice . . . These and these things are positive laws. But Grotius still—Grotius's book as a whole presents international law on all levels, whereas later on men like Pufendorf, Vattel . . . presented only the natural law.[xl] And that applies also to natural law in other classes of law. The establishment of natural law as an independent and separate discipline, that is connected with another aspect: natural right takes on the form of a discipline, of a deductive discipline which it never had in the past. There is a man who ought not to be mentioned in any survey of the history of natural right, because he rejected the very notion of natural right—that was Spinoza—and yet the title of his book, *Ethics*, demonstrated in a geometric manner, describes most clearly what this new natural right was meant to be, a natural right demonstrated in a geometric manner. You have certain fundamental axioms and deductively from them you establish . . . Hobbes, for example, tried to present such a natural right doctrine in the *Leviathan* and in his other political works. Locke did not do that explicitly, but he made it perfectly clear that it is the only correct way of teaching natural right. Ethics can be made as demonstrable as mathematics; that is the meaning of that. In the end, in the latter half of the eighteenth century, as Gierke, one of the best historians . . . as Gierke put it, natural law was treated as the code of laws taught by reason,[18] whereas the positive law was thought to be a system of ordinances issued for its enforcement.[xli] In other words, in this extreme form there cannot be any law whose complete content is not natural law. The positive law is, so to say, merely an ordinance which makes that natural law effective. From this that led to absolutely ridiculous consequences, especially in Germany where . . . had very great opportunities in former ages. They even made there a natural feudal law because, arguing as follows, if the institution of fiefs is not completely immoral and irrational there must be some rational basis for it. And that is the natural law concept of a fief. And then they deduced from that a complete natural feudal law. Natural penal law, that goes without saying; laws regarding punishment and degrees of punishment for different crimes established only by reason and so on.

Now the fourth characteristic of modern natural right is the connection of natural right doctrine with the notion of a state of nature. No such connection between natural law or natural right and the state of nature existed in former times. The state of nature . . . is the state in which man finds himself prior to the establishment of authority: man living without a "common superior on earth," as Locke puts it.[xlii] Men living in such a condition are living in a state of nature. The term "state of nature" originated not in political theory but in Christian theology. I have said this previously, but I have to state it again, because it seems to be generally unknown that this is really the origin of the concept of the state of nature. Now in Christian theology a distinction was made between the state of nature and the state of grace; so in Christian theologians, say, even

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[xxxvii] The transcript has a blank space here. *The Law of War and Peace, Jure Belli ac Pacis* (sometimes translated *The Right of War and* Peace), was published in 1625.
[xxxviii] In the transcript: "(Grotius?)"
[xxxix] In the transcript: "(a kind of?)."
[xl] Samuel von Pufendorf (1632-1694), author of *Of the Law of Nature and Nations* (1672); Emerich de Vattel (1714-1767), author of *The Law of Nations* (1758).
[xli] See Otto von Gierke, *Natural Law and the Theory of Society 1500 to 1800*, trans. Ernest Barker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950).
[xlii] Locke, *Second Treatise*, sec. 19.

Suárez, that is a contemporary of Hobbes, or Grotius[xliii] . . . even speaks of the state of nature, he means a state in which man is considered as man and not as Christian. So if you take, say, the Hindus: they live in organized society with government and so on; they live in the state of nature because they do not live under grace. The state of nature has nothing to do with the absence of authority; on the contrary, it includes the presence of authority. The other state would be unnatural if man did not have government. A state of nature was . . . into a state of pure nature and fallen nature. Pure nature prior to the Fall, and fallen nature after the Fall.

Now this[19] this distinction was replaced by a distinction between a state of nature and the state of civil society. You see, I think immediately what happened—the distinction between the state of pure nature and fallen nature was abolished, which means in plain English [that] the Fall was not very important, if it has taken place at all. That's[xliv] irrelevant. Secondly, the remedy for the state of nature, especially for the state of fallen nature, was in the theological scheme[xlv] grace. Now we need a different remedy for the state of nature and for its deficiencies, and that is civil government. So in other words, the distinction had originally a very clear antitheological implication, which you can see in[20] various ways; for example, in the remarks which Rousseau makes in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, when he comes back to the doctrine of the state of nature and says: Well, if we accept the biblical doctrine, we can't expect a notion of a state of nature, because according to the Bible—I mean, if we translate this doctrine into biblical terms—there never was a state of nature because prior to the Fall, Adam was in the state of pure nature, sure, but the divine graces were added. So it wasn't a state of pure nature; it was a state of grace, too. And afterwards you have the state of fallen nature, which is not a state of nature proper . . . So this doctrine was definitely an antitheological, antibiblical doctrine . . . substitution of civil government for grace.[xlvi]

At any rate, Hobbes himself almost apologizes . . . for using the term "state of nature." That was at that time a novel term in political doctrine; and of course when you read the historical literature about political theory you find references to the state of nature almost everywhere, but they are wholly unfounded. For example, when you find in the Epicurean tradition, say, in the poem *On the Nature of Things*, by Lucretius, a description of man at the beginning, where they were roaming in forests without any authority: people call that a state of nature, which is simply nonsense, because from Lucretius's point of view that was not the state of nature. The state of nature in Lucretius would be the life of a philosopher living in a city. That would be a completely improper use of the term.

I give you just one piece of documentary evidence regarding the relative novelty of this notion, and that I take from Locke, *Second Treatise on Civil Government*, chapter 2, "Of the State of Nature." In the last paragraph of [the chapter, paragraph][xlvii] 15, he says:

"To those that say, There were never any men in the State of Nature; I will not only oppose the authority of the judicious Hooker . . . where he says, *The laws which have been hitherto*

[xliii] In the transcript: "(Grotius?)."
[xliv] In the transcript: "That's (?)"
[xlv] In the transcript: "(scheme?)."
[xlvi] The transcriber notes that there was a question-and-answer period that is missing from the transcript.
[xlvii] The transcript has ellipses here.

mentioned, i.e. [that is to say—LS] the Laws of Nature *do bind Men absolutely, even as they are Men, although they have never any settled fellowship, never any Solemn Agreement amongst themselves what to do or not to do, but for as much as we are not by our selves sufficient to furnish our selves with competent store of things, needful for such a Life, as our Nature doth desire, a Life, fit for the Dignity of Man; therefore to supply those Defects and Imperfections which are in us, as living singly and solely by our selves, we are naturally induced to seek Communion and Fellowship with others, this was the Cause of Mens uniting themselves, at first in Politick Societies*. But I [Locke—LS] moreover affirm, That all Men are naturally in that State, and remain so, till by their own Consents they make themselves Members of some Politick Society."[xlviii]

Locke says here explicitly, "I moreover affirm" . . . something which the judicious Hooker never said, to say nothing of the fact that the judicious Hooker never uses the term "state of nature." So that is a novel doctrine even in 1688, to say nothing of 1540.

The only slight complication . . . would arise perhaps in connection with Hugo Grotius and . . . because in Hugo Grotius there are a few references to the state of pure nature which are ambiguous. I believe that Grotius understands by the state of nature exactly what Suárez understood by it, namely, the state of man not living under grace, and not the state antedating civil society.

The fifth and last distinctive mark of modern natural right which I would mention is this: that in the modern natural right, right is primarily understood as right in the subjective sense, or as rights. In the older orientation, natural right or natural law defines primarily man's duties, the rights being derivative from the duties, whereas in the classic modern case, the duties were understood as derivative from the rights . . . when you read the crucial passages of Thomas Aquinas in the *Theologica Summa* about natural law and natural right in the *prima secundae*, [question 94] on natural law.[xlix] And then in the *secunda secundae*, [question][21] 57,[l] if you read that, all the remarks made about natural law . . . In this book by D'Entreves, *Selected Readings from Thomas Aquinas*, from the Blackwell political text edition, there is a . . . statement in the introduction where he makes it clear there are no natural rights in Thomas Aquinas except by implication.[li] But if something is only implied, it is not in the foreground of the argument. In Hooker, in the thematic treatment of natural law in the first part, the first book of *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* also all the examples are duties, none of rights.

In Hobbes there are a number of extremely interesting points, and perhaps the most important . . . In the first place . . . Hobbes says even learned men use the terms right and law

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[xlviii] Locke, *The Second Treatise*, sec. 15.

[xlix] In the transcript: "(an article in the 90s on natural law?)." In the transcript, Strauss must mean a "question," rather than an article. In the *Summa Theologiae*, Prima Secundae Partis, Questions 90-108 (of this First Part of Part 2) indeed comprise the "Treatise on Law" within the *Summa*. Strauss most probably refers here to question 94, "Of the Natural Law." The questions are divided into "articles."

[l] *Summa*, Second Part of Part 2, question 57, "Of Right."

[li] Thomas Aquinas, *Selected Political Writings*, ed. A. P. D'Entrèves, trans. J. G. Dawson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1959). For the statement in D'Entrèves's introduction to which Strauss refers, see pages xiii-xiv, xix-xx, xxvi, and emphatically xxx-xxxi.

synonymously, Latin *jus* and *leges* . . . the terms "right" and "law" had the same meaning, so whether you said natural right or natural law, you meant the same thing. There are some differences there, by the way, but they are absolutely irrelevant in our present context. We can disregard them. And now . . . Hobbes says this difference is enormously important, and we must make a distinction between right and law. And what is right? Right is the liberty a man has to do or to forebear something, and a law is something which restrains this liberty, a duty or obligation. But this distinction between right and law is an emphatic distinction and is of some importance, but it is nothing compared with what is coming now: that in Hobbes's doctrine of natural right or natural law, natural right comes first, meaning all duties and obligations of man are deduced from natural right or natural rights. First there are some fundamental rights, and out of them we can deduce some duties and obligations. So we have here a very clear case, and the clearest case, of the simple primacy of rights as contrasted with duties or obligations.

I give you some other examples. Kant, who wrote at the end of this period, say, in the 80's of the eighteenth century,[lii] says it is really a problem why moral philosophy [is] usually called the doctrine of duties, as it has been called since time immemorial. Why is it not also called a doctrine of rights? You see, what Kant missed in the whole tradition was first coming to the fore in modern times. I mention another example, with some hesitation because it is a long time since I checked on that. In Descartes's moral treatise, *The Passions of the Soul*, I believe there are one or two references to right, the rights which I have. If I am not mistaken, there is not a single mention of duties. There is of course an infinite number of detailed examples on the lower level; and when you read the book by Gierke, *The Development of Political Theory*, [as] it is called in the English translation,[liii] which is a very useful book, he will tell you how much this doctrine of rights [was] expressed in the eighteenth century and what developed in detail. A wholly novel phenomenon.

The evidence needs of course some discussion . . . There is a precautionary measure which must be taken if one doesn't want to misinterpret it. I give you just one example. If we speak of the right of resistance in former times, or the right of self-preservation, for that matter, it doesn't mean what it means in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The right of resistance frequently means something which is allowed as a form of obedience. In other words, if you resist a tyrant, maybe killing [him], and this action is understood by everyone concerned as a form of obeying the natural law, it means something different. Or [if] the right of self-preservation is understood as fulfilling a duty, in other words, so that you are defending yourself, [it] has fundamentally the same character as your refraining from committing suicide—an entirely different understanding of the same overt act. Generally speaking, the concern with rights had in the theory of the past the character of a fulfillment of duties rather than of concern with rights.

Let us see what this means. Up to now we have only given a kind of descriptive distinction between modern and premodern natural right. The interpretation of the difference depends a bit on where you seek the origin of this modern natural right. In the book by Ritchie on natural

[lii] That is, the 1780's.

[liii] Otto von Gierke, *The Development of Political Theory*, trans. Bernard Freyd (New York: H. Fertig, 1966).

right,[liv] you will find the view which has been restated thousands of times, that the origin of the rights of man . . . are the English Puritans. Now this view of Ritchie, which you still find today in the more popular literature . . . I believe is connected with Ritchie's views of the Reformation. Ritchie understands the Reformation as follows: the Reformation appealed to the private judgment, that is to say, to the reason and conscience of the individual, and this was the origin out of which the doctrine of the rights of man grew. Now this understanding of the Reformation is extremely questionable and I believe no longer accepted by careful students, because this appeal to the reason and conscience of the individual[22] in Luther and Calvin's teachings was of course always an appeal to the reason and conscience of the individual illuminated by the Holy Spirit. There was an essential connection assumed between this illumination and the Bible. Furthermore, regarding the English Puritans, one must also mention the fact that Figgis,[lv] a better historian—as a matter of fact a very good historian—noted and showed that right . . . occurred in certain Spanish Jesuits and Dominicans of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, that is to say, decades before the Puritans of whom Ritchie speaks.

But even if you look at these texts, say, of Suárez or others, you see that this is really the Thomistic doctrine. And in commenting on Thomas Aquinas on proper occasions they give a list of certain rights which every individual has according to natural right on the basis of Thomas. The framework of Thomas is in no way affected; they only draw some inferences from Thomas. No, this fundamental difference between modern and premodern natural right can never be understood by[23] [these] slight and strictly subordinate changes. There is only one place where we find the radical change made with full clarity about the fact that it is a radical change, and that was Hobbes. For example, in the Epistle Dedicatory to his earliest work, *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic*, he makes this clear: that up to now there was no natural right or natural law doctrine.[lvi] People have built natural law in the air, as he says, and he's going to make a radical reform of natural law by virtue of which we will give for the first time a scientific natural law teaching. So the best starting point would have to be an analysis of Hobbes's doctrine.

Before I say something, of course rather sketchily, about Hobbes's doctrine and also Locke and Rousseau, I would like to illustrate the general character of this modern natural law from a somewhat different angle. Let us start from the most superficial angle, from the word "semantics." The term which was in common use in former times, at least in the Western Latin world, was natural law, a term which is today no longer used except historically . . . except of course for Thomists. But the term which is still sometimes used, or was used a short time ago, which comes closer to our habits of thinking and feeling, is the term used by Tom Paine in the title of his book, which is "the rights of man." The rights of man are a modification of natural

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[liv] David George Ritchie, *Natural Rights: A Criticism of Some Political and Ethical Conceptions* (1903).
[lv] John Neville Figgis (1866-1919), English historian and political thinker, author of *The Theory of the Divine Right of Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896), and *Studies of Political Thought from Gerson to Grotius, 1414-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907).
[lvi] Hobbes, *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, ed. J.C.A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 19-20. (Strauss refers to the *Elements* as Hobbes's "earliest work." It is Hobbes's earliest major English work: *De Cive* was published in 1642, but the *Elements* may have been written before or at the same time as *De Cive*.)

law—we can say the modern modification. Now let us look just at the word. Now in the first place, the substitution of right for law is very significant.[lvii]

[1] Deleted “with property—.”
[2] Deleted “that.”
[3] Deleted “is the only one which.”
[4] Deleted “there is.”
[5] Deleted “the voters in the [],”
[6] Deleted “But here—.”
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[11] Deleted “of”
[12] Deleted “today.”
[13] Deleted “for.”
[14] Deleted “to which.”
[15] Deleted “and.”
[16] Deleted “of that.”
[17] Deleted “this might create such evil”
[18] Deleted “and.”
[19] Deleted “was replaced.”
[20] Deleted “makes.”
[21] Deleted “article.”
[22] Deleted “was.”
[23] Deleted “this.”

[lvii] The transcript of this session ends here.

Session 9: no date
Natural Right: Machiavelli and Hobbes

Leo Strauss: [In progress] It was for this reason that the rejection by large groups of men, or by the overwhelming majority of men in the Western world in the last two centuries was caused directly by the deficiencies of modern natural right. We enumerated five characteristic features of modern natural right. In the first place, it is natural constitutional right. In the second place, it is revolutionary. In the third place, it becomes an independent discipline; more precisely, it tries to take on the form of a deductive system. Fourth, it is linked up to a notion of a state of nature. And fifth, it is primarily a doctrine of rights as distinguished from duties. I illustrated this last point towards the end of the last meeting by stating its moral implication in the sharpest possible form: that virtue is replaced by freedom. And this means that the limitation of the arbitrary will of each is no longer supposed to take place by substantive principles coming from above but, as it were, "horizontally," meaning a limitation of the arbitrary will of each by the arbitrary will of others or by what can be presumed to be the arbitrary will of others. So in other words, if I desire my own self-preservation, and all others can desire their own self-preservation as well, hence my desire for self-preservation must be limited by the consideration of the desire of self-preservation of others. No other limitation has to be considered.

Now what does this kind of doctrine mean? How can we understand it? I made the observation last time that at first glance this doctrine seems to be much more practical, much more "realistic" than the traditional doctrine. The pivot of the traditional doctrine had been the perfection of man: virtue. Now the appeal to virtue seems to be somewhat outlandish in the daily life of politics, where the appeal to property, life, liberty, and similar things seems to be really practical. Now whatever we may have to think about this aspect, it helps us in understanding this doctrine and its fundamental motivation. For the origin, we have to return to Machiavelli, because Machiavelli was the thinker who attacked the traditional political doctrine on the ground that it was not practical. It did not teach, as he called it, effective or factual truths, but only, if at all, true ones which would not be practical or valuable in action. The notion which he attacked was that there is a perfection of man in the light of which we can understand what the best social order or the best regime is. But this best social order was supposed to be possible in accordance with the nature of man, but its actualization extremely improbable, depending on chance. Machiavelli attacked this view as follows: We ought not to take our bearings by how men ought to live, but by how they do live. In other words, not to take the highest goals which societies might pursue or ought to pursue, but to take the goals which are actually pursued by those societies we know of. Now these goals are of course not virtue but freedom from tyranny, from foreign domination, prosperity, and empire. And in the light of these goals actually pursued by all societies [there] must be established the best kind of society possible.

Machiavelli deliberately lowered the standards of political action; and this means at the same time that he expected to achieve in this way, with a slight exaggeration, control of chance. If the standards are lowered, the goal is more likely to be achieved. Hence we are less likely to depend

on chance. We may say that what Machiavelli tried to establish were standards whose actualization is probable, if not certain. But what comes of morality in this scheme, or human perfection? Answer: Virtue is the sum of habits conducive to the common good, which means that virtue is defined in terms of the common good and not, as hitherto had been the case, that the common good was defined in terms of virtue. That is the meaning of the famous saying of Machiavelli: The end justifies the means. The end is the common good. In the sense of freedom, prosperity, power, etc., the end justifies the means. The human habits conducive to this ordinary political end, they are justified by that end and no other moral consideration is legitimate. It means that virtue is nothing but social virtue, something like patriotism or public-spiritedness, or devotion to collective selfishness. From here we would understand, if we had the time for that, utilitarianism.

Utilitarianism is one form, a relatively unobnoxious form, of Machiavellianism. Whatever is conducive to the greatest happiness of the greatest number is good; whatever is not conducive or destructive is bad. No other consideration enters. To be sure, in fairness to John Stuart Mill, he made this more human but also perhaps less consistent.[i] Now Machiavelli doesn't leave it at that; he gives a more radical analysis. Collective selfishness is rooted according to Machiavelli in the selfishness of the individual. Men are by nature bad, he says. That means selfish. Therefore, society as society is derivative; and if society is derivative, virtue even in Machiavelli's sense is derivative. I mention only one point regarding the selfish origins of virtue. There is one selfish motivation which Machiavelli regards as crucially important for the foundation and existence of society, and that is glory. The selfish concern of a human being with his eternal fame motivates him to establish a society, and of course a stable and lasting society, because the stability of a society is a necessity for the stability of his fame. So there is a kind of fortunate [coincidence]: nature is so kind as to create man with one passion, one selfish passion, which cannot be satisfied except by devotion to other people, but what is really motivating the individual is the selfish thing. Now of course this is an extremely sketchy and superficial account of Machiavelli, but this serves as sufficient for our present purposes.

Now Machiavelli rejects natural right altogether, but this Machiavellian approach, Machiavellian understanding, induced later thinkers to attempt a radical reform of natural right on the Machiavellian basis. The crucial thinker is Hobbes. Hobbes opposes Machiavelli, but he accepts Machiavelli's principle to the extent that he says the traditional natural right doctrine is impossible because it is so impracticable, appealing [as it does] to something which is very weak in man: concern with virtue or reason. Against Machiavelli he said there is no necessity that society should rest, as Machiavelli said it must, on unjust foundations. That is, for Machiavelli the fact or myth that a fratricide was the founder of Rome reveals an eternal truth: that the foundation of every society is always injustice. And of course this has very great practical consequences, because if the foundation is laid in injustice, it would show all the time and in all interesting situations this: We have to repeat Romulus's action, though sometimes in a modified manner—especially in foreign policy, but also[1] when the going gets rough in domestic affairs. Hobbes, in this respect very sober, sees no necessity for that. The obvious need for society is sufficient reason why the foundations of society need not be in injustice. But, Hobbes argues,[2] while we must admit that justice is a principle of its own, justice or natural right or natural law must be based not on the end of man, the perfection of man, or [on] virtue, but on a force which

[i] J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* (1861).

is actually effective in all men all of the time—and if we can't find that, at least which is effective in most men most of the time. And that can only be a passion, because reason is weak. Therefore we have to look out for the strongest passion and to find in it the foundation of society and of justice. This passion according to Hobbes is the fear of violent death. The fear of violent death is the most impressive manifestation of the urge or desire for self-preservation. The desire for self-preservation shows itself [most] manifestly[3] [in being killed][ii] by another man. Now Hobbes says this fear or this desire is the root of all justice. What a man does in order to defend his life and limbs is absolutely just, regardless of circumstances, and[4] it is defensible before every tribunal.

One can state Hobbes's argument as follows. There have always been people who tried to be practical about justice and tried to prove that justice is not something substantial, natural, but conventional. Take the two men on a shipwreck. Now if there were justice, they would of course never kill an innocent man. The other man is presumably as innocent as he is, and thus we are supposed to assume that they would do that . . . But the example is not decisive, even though there may be better ones. There are cases in which it doesn't make sense to speak of justice, although the subject matter itself would seem to fall under justice. And Hobbes says: No, just the opposite follows. The example of Carneades is the proof of the substantial character of justice. The case which Carneades regarded as the example of the refutation of justice, Hobbes regarded as the proof of justice. Both [shipwrecked men] mean to, will try to kill each other, and we can't blame either [one]. In the extreme case, where justice seems to break down, justice is revealed in that action which is absolutely just, and we are going to build a society on this basis. One could perhaps say that Hobbes's argument against Carneades is similar to Descartes's attempt to get out of[5] universal doubt. These arguments which were generally regarded as disposing of the possibility of knowledge, according to Descartes, prove the possibility of knowledge because the fact that I doubt proves that I am, and that is all I need. And Hobbes similarly says:[6] The fact that both cannot be blamed for acting unjustly according to ordinary standards—that they cannot be blamed means that they are blameless and acting justly. And we take this as our starting point, and we can build up a perfectly consistent and coherent system of principles of justice.

A few points I would like to mention because I am limited by the consideration that I have to explain to you the principles of modern natural right in a general way and not to dwell too much on the peculiarities of the particular teachings. The fear of violent death or the urge to self-preservation as the overpowering force is identical with the right to self-preservation, because that is right which cannot be altered or blamed—which is absolutely right, which cannot possibly be blamed under any circumstances. Now the fact that a man resists assault is so irresistible is due to such an overpowering force within him that he cannot be blamed under any circumstances. Therefore we can speak of the right to self-preservation as the fundamental right. It is a right and not a duty. The fundamental moral fact is a right and not a duty, and this has something to do with the peculiar realism of these doctrines, because it seemed to them that to appeal to rights is more practical, more effective, more solid, than an appeal to duties. People can be depended upon to fight for their rights; they can much less be depended upon to do their duties. Now since I have a right to my self-preservation, I have a right to the means to my self-preservation. That's obvious. A right to the end implies a right to the means; for example, to that stick or to that stone. But that leads to a further difficulty. In some cases, it may be doubtful

[ii] The transcript has a blank space here.

whether this thing or this action is or is not conducive to my self-preservation. Who is going to decide? The older thinkers would have said: You have to ask a man of practical wisdom. Maybe you are a fool, and you would make a wrong choice and therefore endanger your self-preservation. To which Hobbes says: No, everyone must be the judge, for the very reason that everyone is concerned with his [own] self-preservation, and the wise man, although wise, is much less concerned with the self-preservation of the fool than the fool himself. So let interest and passion be the substitute for knowledge. It's more trustworthy here. The right to judgment means the right to judgment of each, of everyone.

Now but if that is so, we are led to this fantastic consequence: that if a fool has as much right to judge of the means to self-preservation as the reasonable man, then a fool might consider any means, any action as conducive to self-preservation. And that is of the essence of folly, when he can't distinguish [for] himself; and that means the right of everyone to judge of the means conducive to his self-preservation leads to the right of everyone to every action and everything. In this part of his argument, Hobbes is really very good: one thing follows from another. But if everyone has the right to everything and every action, that means a war of everybody against everybody is a permanent condition. And this situation, which follows from the right to self-preservation, is fatal to self-preservation. And there is, however, a simple way out. We realize in this situation that the whole condition of war is fatal to self-preservation, and therefore there is an absolute need for peace. And so self-preservation requires peace, but peace is not possible if men do not have habits of peaceful intercourse. These habits are conditions, indispensable conditions of peace. These conditions of peace, as far as they are human habits, this is according to Hobbes virtue. Morality is nothing but peaceableness, which includes of course being kind, considerate, and all the other aspects of peace.

Now[7] in the terminological language, natural right is the fundamental premise. From natural right, we deduce the laws of nature, viz., the moral laws. The laws of nature stipulate the conditions of peace, the way[8] men have to live or to act in order to become able to live together with others. Now this natural law, the moral law—it is the same thing—is only conditionally valid, namely, you are under no obligation to act kindly and decently[9] [unless] it is not dangerous to act kindly or decently. Now it is dangerous to act kindly and decently if there is war, if you cannot trust the other fellow when he is your enemy. Therefore the natural or moral law becomes obligatory only after you can reasonably trust other human beings, and that means only after government has been established. You can also say there must take place a kind of . . . before a disarmament—of course not a universal disarmament, but a disarmament of the future members of a given state. Before they have become disarmed by the establishment of a common government over all of them, it is foolish to be kind; but after it has been established, it is your duty to be kind because that's the only way in which this condition can be preserved. Now government, the government must be sovereign. The hands of the government must be untied, because if they are tied, there will be conflict and hence no peace. It cannot protect you. It must be sovereign, strictly speaking; and therefore Hobbes can also say [that] the duty of man consists in absolute obedience to the sovereign. Only by that course of action can he preserve his life. The alternative would always be anarchy, chaos, or war.

So then we have here in Hobbes—I say this in anticipation of later things—something like a substantive principle of morality akin to Machiavelli's, because in Machiavelli morality becomes

patriotism, devotion to collective selfishness, a kind of social virtue, a limited virtue. Hobbes rejects this Machiavellian notion, but in Hobbes virtue is peacefulness. One could also say humanity or benevolence, terms that Hobbes does not yet use, but which were used shortly after him by people who were influenced by him. Now this is a substantive principle of morality, but there is a possible conflict between peaceableness and unqualified civil obedience. You can easily see it. Your sovereign may command you to do something which is an act of unkindness. Take[10] [the] case of a vicious tyrant like Nero or Hitler—that can easily happen. Therefore there is a conflict, [as] I said, between morality as peaceableness and unqualified civil obedience. And Hobbes tries to get out of this difficulty by asserting that the most fundamental obligation, moral obligation, is the obedience to the government, or obedience to any positive law, so that the substantive moral principle, peaceableness or kindness, is subordinated to this formal principle: obedience to any positive law. Why this subordination? For the sake of an effective and stable social order. Or still more precisely, Hobbes needs a universally valid rule of action. The universally valid rule of action cannot be to act kindly, because your sovereign may forbid you to act kindly. But the only universally valid rule of action is to obey the law. Now this sovereign, the Hobbean sovereign . . . his sovereignty implies unlimited power—of course, of the present sovereign. We have spoken of this before, and that means already that it is a fundamentally revolutionary doctrine. There is no legitimacy, no prescription which can and must limit the sovereign. Hobbes always argues as follows. If that would be, there would have to be some institution embodying that prescriptive right, and then you would be subject to two masters, say, the French Parlement and the king. And then you have already civil discord. It's always a very simple argument: there must be one man or body of men who is ultimately in control in every respect, and every division of this ultimate power is already anarchy or chaos.

The basic reasoning which I sketched implies two other points typical of the modern doctrine: in the first place, the primacy of rights as contrasted with duties; and secondly it implies, as I think you have seen, the concept of the state of nature. This primacy of rights is impossible if man does not precede, the individual does not precede society, and while preceding society is endowed with rights. That is, man prior to society is already a moral person, moral being, having rights but no duties. That is the meaning of the state of nature. If we would trace this whole doctrine to its origin, we would always come back to this, to a concern with an ideal, we can say, or with a standard whose actualization is probable, an order of universal validity and of universal applicability. This is the concrete Hobbean doctrine, the doctrine of sovereignty. This is universally valid and universally applicable. Natural constitutional law in the widest sense of the term, where even a doctrine of absolute sovereignty is also a doctrine of public [law]—if you don't like the word "constitution" here when we speak of Hobbes, then you [can] say natural public law, but that's the same thing.

As for the primacy of right,[11] the practical importance of this becomes clear from the fact that this fundamental natural right persists within civil society, according to Hobbes. So much so that even a man who is condemned to death in a perfectly legal and just manner has the right, or in a way even acquires the right, to kill the guard and anyone else who wants to prevent him from escaping violent death, so that the situation of a justly condemned criminal to his executioner or to his guards is exactly like that of one man in a state of nature to another. The fundamental right of self-preservation survives. And furthermore, these rights, these fundamental rights determine[12] the function of civil society. What is the primary function of civil society? Peace, protection, the

guarantee of the self-preservation of each. This kind of doctrine, which starts from fundamental rights as a primary moral fact and defines the function of the state in terms of these rights, namely, safeguarding of the natural rights, we may call [a] liberal doctrine. And I believe that it is the best use of that extremely ambiguous term "liberalism." And at any rate, if we understand liberalism in this sense, we may say that Hobbes is the founder of liberalism by being the founder of the modern natural right doctrine.

There is a fundamental difficulty in Hobbes's doctrine of which he himself was aware, namely, the whole construction rests on the premise that the fear of violent death is the strongest passion. But is this really true? Are people not capable of overcoming that fear? Hobbes was especially concerned with one case, that people braved violent death—[iii] . . . of powers invisible, of religion, is a stronger power than fear of violent death. The fear of spirits invisible is indeed stronger empirically than the fear of violent death. But why? Because people believe in the fear of spirits invisible. Once this delusion has been destroyed, the fear of violent death with its effects will come into its own. That means that only by virtue of enlightenment does fear of violent death come into its own, and therefore the right social order come into its own. The actualization of the right social order depends on enlightenment, and that enlightenment means diffusion of philosophic or scientific knowledge.

Now Hobbes's natural law teaching, this teaching about the virtues and about sovereignty, leads to knowledge of the right kind of institution. This knowledge must of course be put into practice. The right kind of institutions must be actually a fact, but that is relatively easy. The crucial point is, first, that the right kind of social institutions[13] [be] realized for what they are; and secondly, that people are enlightened about their self-interest, namely, that these and only these institutions are conducive to their self-interest. If we have these and these things, and if these two conditions are fulfilled, if the right kinds of institutions are known and people are enlightened about them, this is the sufficient condition for establishing the right social order. Chance does not play any role any more. Hobbes knows the truth; he enlightens people via Oxford and Cambridge. That is what he wanted, that his books should become the textbooks, and then everything else must follow. Exhortation and dehortation, as he put it—or moral appeal, as we would put it[14]—are a nuisance and are wholly ineffective in this situation.

Now will you allow me to add one more point, and then I am through with this. There is one difficulty in Hobbes, and [one] which I think is quite obvious and which most people have realized in this doctrine: namely, let us grant self-preservation, but what becomes of self-preservation if the sovereign is a Nero, or a Hitler, or a Himmler, or a Malenkov or whatnot? Hobbes says you retain your natural right to . . . against these gangsters, and in effect you retain your natural right against any government, against any Leviathan. But clearly, what is the value of that right? What is the possibility of a puny individual to defend himself against the mighty Leviathan and all its power? That is an argument which everyone, all the great thinkers after Hobbes, made against him. The answer they gave was this: The social order must be constructed in such a manner as to give me a guarantee for self-preservation within the social order itself. In other words, it must give me a guarantee for the persistence of the power of my judgment on the means of self-preservation, because what does it mean if I retain, if I judge the means of self-preservation within society? That sounds very abstruse, means of self-preservation and

[iii] The tape was changed at this point.

judging of means of self-preservation. It means judgment on laws. So in other words, an effective participation by an individual in legislation is absolutely necessary if there is to be guarantee of means of self-preservation in society. That was the criticism especially of men like Locke and Rousseau, to whom I turn after [this]. Mr. . . . ?

Student: I'm just wondering . . . [iv]

LS: So in other words, all that splendor which Machiavelli still acknowledged, Hobbes doesn't like. Hobbes is much too sober for that. That is a fantastical pleasure, pride. And what is substantive is comfort—comfort, you know that is really . . . Still, in Hobbes's own doctrine, pride survives in a qualified form. What is pride? The desire for superiority—that's what Hobbes understands by it—and for recognition of superiority by others. It survives in Hobbes's doctrine in one form: competition, peaceful competition—but, you know, severely watched by the sovereign, so long as he does not want to extirpate you but only to subordinate you. That was the first point. Now it implies of course another consideration which is very important. There is according to Hobbes some fundamentally vicious thing in man: this pride. And therefore government is always needed and will always be needed, because no progress can ever come to the point where government will be superfluous, because of this antisocial element in every man. But you raised another point in your question which I have not answered.

Student: I just wondered why Hobbes picks on that, and Machiavelli picks on the other as more persuasive.

LS: That was not arbitrary. If you take the commonsense notions of justice admitted by Machiavelli himself, what would you say, if someone else . . . nothing else has to be considered. Just take this clear case. Here is a man who is attacked by another man merely because the other wants to push him around. And the other fellow just defends his life; he doesn't want to push anyone else around. Who has the better case of the two? The fellow who wants to be let alone. Machiavelli admits the same thing. If you take this crude case, it is clear [that] the claim of self-preservation in the narrow sense of the term is much juster, infinitely juster, than the claims of pride. That has no reason, that someone wants to be recognized as superior to another and to lord it over them. That has no reason.

Student: But then the criterion is not whether one is better than the other, but whether one has a better basis on which to base his claim.

LS: That is what[15] Machiavelli says. You will not get this just order which recognizes the simple demands of a simple man for being left alone with his life, wife, liberty, and a little property. And these are the most reasonable demands which men could make. You won't get that if you do not have gangsters like Cesare Borgia around, who establish that order out of gangster motives. That is Machiavelli's point. And Hobbes is somewhat narrower. You know, Hobbes leaves it; the question of the motivation of the founder doesn't concern him. He is concerned only with the legal question of the right that government must have. Well, of course that is only an extremely tiny sketch of an argument, but it is perhaps a sign[16] to some of you that these matters allow of argument. In other words, if we had the opposition of Machiavelli and Hobbes, we have not

[iv] There is a break in the tape at this point.

simply to say: Well, that is a great mystery. Here is a man in Florence, that is the Renaissance man, you know, in Italy; and here we have the son of an Elizabethan clergyman, who was no longer very pious but had this basic English honesty, you know, and so that's all there is to that. No. [There][17] is an argument which is going on between them. And it would not be too difficult, but it would take at least one hour, to show how many elements of Hobbes you found in Machiavelli already. But Machiavelli's point is simply: How do we get that? And in other words, we can also say that it is so characteristic that the most famous book of Machiavelli has the title—you know the title of the most famous book of Machiavelli? Yes, *The Prince*; don't be so bashful. The most scientific book of Machiavelli has the title, not the most famous—not Machiavelli but Hobbes has the title of *The Citizen*.[v] Hobbes did not write a book on the prince. That is very interesting. He looked at government from the point of view of the simple man. And Machiavelli considered more plainly this more fundamental question: How to get the whole order? And therefore the questions of policy, both domestic and foreign, are treated much more carefully by Machiavelli than by Hobbes. Hobbes leaves it at some very sketchy remarks. Again, the predominance of this legal interest: he is much more concerned with the delineation of the rights of the sovereign than with defining how these rights should be used. Machiavelli, we can say, has a broader view, but that does not mean that Hobbes is not very important even from Machiavelli's own point of view, for clarifying certain limited parts of Machiavelli's argument.

Student: Is it your understanding that Machiavelli lowered the standards of the state in order to limit the role of chance?[vi]

LS: Well, if the standards are very high, the prospects of actualization are very small. In other words, the actualization of the best order depends on chance, on the coming together of many things . . . of which there is no necessity that they should come together. Now if you lowered the standards, the presumption is that you can get it more easily. That is a very problematic assertion, but in certain features it is doubtless true. But even there it is not quite true, as I could prove to you from some experiences right here at the University of Chicago. But[18] let us take a perfectly simple case. If you want a million dollars, it is more difficult than if you lowered your demands to two hundred dollars. It is not universally true. If you want to have a research project which would cost three hundred dollars, you would be much less likely to get it than one for ten thousand dollars. But still, this amusing difficulty may show that there may be something wrong about the other matter in this broad field—whether this, the lowering of the standards, is really in these crucial matters a better guarantee in the long run for getting what you want. In other words, it is as difficult to get, say, a society based on the most complete and perfect satisfaction of the elementary wants[19] [as it is to get] Plato's *Republic*. Does this make sense? Let us assume that everyone has all the calories, and all the housing, plumbing, clothing, and so on which [a] very liberal physician, or architect, or city-planner would prescribe. Would this society be one of happy people, necessarily? Would it not give rise to further [or] to a new kind of dissatisfaction? Would the demand for real needs be superseded by the demand for fancied needs, so that it is a kind of infinite process, and by no means simply something which you can get? That is a long question into which I don't go now.

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[v] Strauss seems here to distinguish Machiavelli's most famous book (*The Prince*) and Hobbes's lesser known but most scientific book (*The Citizen*). Machiavelli's primary concern is with princes while Hobbes's primary concern is with citizens.

[vi] The transcriber notes that the first part of the question is "indistinct."

Student: Just one further question. The distinction you made between ancient and modern the other day was that the ancients thought of the ideal and the best possible state, and the moderns, when they entered, think of the ideal as something which they try to attain. Well, does Machiavelli come into the modern picture?

LS: Not quite. Machiavelli, not quite. The principle is in Machiavelli to the extent to which he rejects the classical notion of the best order as something which is fundamentally improbable but absolutely necessary to see just once, with the mind's eye, in order to take our bearings,[20] to act intelligently politically. Only to that extent. But you can see it very simply. I give you an example, anticipating what I would say later. Rousseau, in his *Social Contract*, develops the kind of perfect social order, and that he calls a republic. But of course it has to be as he defines it. And then he says every legitimate government is a republic, which means that every social order which deviates from that is illegitimate. For example, one condition of a republic in Rousseau's sense is that it is a direct democracy and not representative, so this means that practically all governments in the world are illegitimate. That means a blank check for revolution everywhere. Whereas the older scheme was of course that you have to know what is best by all means, and you must not make any false concessions to the prejudices of your particular society, but . . . because you may not necessarily live in the best society. But you have to know the best, however, regardless of any other considerations; but then you have to consider what are the conditions under which it is possible, and then make allowances for imperfect conditions and also see how people can live at least tolerably decently in imperfect conditions, so that there is a kind of staggered order. That is done away with in Rousseau: either legitimate or illegitimate, a simplistic scheme which leads to all kinds of confusion not only in theory but very much in practice. You only have to look around today and see what kind of governments are all lumped together as nondemocratic and therefore illegitimate, whereas if you think of a phenomenon like Kemal Pasha,[vii] that was certainly not a democratic government but it is perfectly possible—I have no judgment on that, not having been in Turkey—that the only thing which could make possible life in Turkey after the breakdown of the old imperial Turkish regime was something like Kemal Pasha, to say nothing of similar considerations. I would also make a distinction between Salazar's regime in Portugal and Franco's regime in Spain,[viii] and so on. This [kind of distinction] is prevented by the kind of simplistic schemes which are fostered by this kind of doctrine, and not so by the older thinkers.

I will turn now to the next great representative of this modern doctrine, and that is Locke. I can say that all I [can] give are very brief sketches, but I hope to bring out the most important points. The principle is the same in Locke as in Hobbes: self-preservation. But Locke says immediately that that excludes absolute government. If self-preservation is the most fundamental desire in man, it can only have government under law, so that we are . . . self-preservation is safeguarded against the government. But equally important in Locke's scheme is another conclusion from the principle of self-preservation, namely, that self-preservation requires not only sticks and stones and guns; we may add [that] it requires, even more primarily, food. If you are too weak on account of starvation to use sticks, sticks are of no use. So you need food, and there is a simple

[vii] Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), founder and first president of the Republic of Turkey.
[viii] Antonio de Oliveira Salazar (1889-1970), prime minister of Portugal, 1932-1968; Francisco Franco (1892-1975), general and dictator, ruled Spain from 1939 to 1975.

way leading from food to property.[21] The most simple step of course is that eating means appropriation, and an appropriation which cannot be surpassed by any other appropriation. But I[22] can't give you[23] even a sketch of Locke's doctrine of property; I mention only some points.

Self-preservation can be itself enlarged.[24] What we want is not merely self-preservation—although in the extreme cases we are satisfied with mere self-preservation—but what we really want is comfortable self-preservation, as Locke puts it. And therefore we do not want just a bare protection against starvation, but we want some reasonable comfort; and that means the right to appropriation must include the right to the enlargement of our possessions beyond immediate needs. In other words, property, to which we have a natural right according to Locke, means in the awful jargon of our time [. . .] property, which can be indefinitely enlarged. Property thus understood must be protected, and this is the function of the state, because it includes life and liberty. This property is sacred. No taxation without representation. In other words, the power of the purse is the most effective restraint on government for the individual, and on the executive in particular.

Now Locke's scheme is much more reasonable on Hobbes's own grounds than Hobbes's scheme was, but in its foundations it is the same. In Locke the scheme is more reasonable because the passion for property is much more important politically than the passion for self-preservation. Within civil society the case of self-preservation[25] very rarely gives rise to an issue, whereas property constantly gives rise to an issue; and also—the other point is obvious—the effective guarantee of self-preservation against a tyrannical government. But the latter point deserves special consideration. Locke had to pay a price for that. Locke has to pay a price for the fact that he gives an effective guarantee for self-preservation against [the] Neros. What is the price? Absorption of the right of the will of the individual by the will of the majority. The famous passages in the *Treatise of Civil Government* about the right of resistance all refer to resistance by the majority, whereas the passages in Hobbes's *Leviathan* especially about resistance all refer to resistance by the individual. The indication of Locke is that [this] is the only effective guarantee you need, because the individual is much too powerless to protect himself against a Nero. The only accumulation of individuals which could do that is the majority or the presumptive majority; therefore it is sufficient if the rights of the individual are absorbed by the majority. The difficulty . . . Locke suffers from certain difficulties here, which we can perhaps indicate.

The question is this. The fundamental fact is, without any question, the desire for self-preservation. The desire for self-preservation is more fundamental than the duties of man formulated in the law of nature, because the law of nature is the law of reason and reason itself is altogether derivative according to Locke. Universals according to Locke are a creature of the understanding. There are no innate ideas. Now if that is so, we have to raise this question: Granting that sense perception, desire, passion, etc., are the most fundamental natural phenomena, is this sufficient, even on this level? Let us look at the matter of food. Does not the attempt of man to procure[26] food lead to entirely different forms of earning one's livelihood? For example, if it is a matter of fishing, or of sewing, this condition and that condition, etc.: the different ways in which man satisfies his need for food leads to a difference of manners of life. These manners of life mold men. We never find these men in the state of nature who are nothing but men and make the social contract; they are always men of a certain kind. Now if this is so,

there is no possibility of a political doctrine of universal applicability, because men are always men of a certain kind, molded by the satisfaction of their elementary wants, and therefore . . . etc. That was the implicit criticism of Locke made by Montesquieu,[27] who accepted the natural right doctrine of Locke on the whole, accepted it with this very crucial reservation: there cannot be natural constitutional right of universal applicability.

I would like then to say some words about Rousseau, in whom this whole doctrine finds its culmination and its end. Again, self-preservation is the beginning, but Rousseau insists more emphatically, not only than Locke but Hobbes as well, on this: that if man is to preserve himself within society, the judgment of each must be preserved in a practical way within society. The power of the purse is not enough. Society must have the full legislative power under all conditions, and everyone must have a vote in the legislative assembly. If you make a separation between the electorate and the legislative assembly, you establish an independent class—let us call them the politicians—whose interests are not simply identical with those of the ordinary citizen. [This is] a kind of criticism which has been repeated time and time against in the twentieth century, especially by Sorel, the critic of the French parliamentarian socialists.[ix] Self-preservation requires that natural law or the moral law be absorbed by the sovereign people. In other words, there must be no practical possibility of appealing from the will of the sovereign people to the natural law.

Now this will of the sovereign people is called by Rousseau the "general will." The general will solves all problems which formerly were supposed to be solved by the natural law. What is the general will? The general will is the will of the community. It is therefore general in regard[28] to its subject. The willing being is the community. But it is also general as regards its object: the thing willed must also be general. How does this come about? According to Rousseau, that's the only way in which you can get justice on earth. Men are by nature selfish, concerned with their self-preservation; natural man is concerned only with his private good. If there is to be society, he must be transformed into a citizen, i.e., a being who is primarily concerned with the common good. If this transformation does not take place, you cannot have a real society. How can it take place? Answer: this question is answered by the general will. How does the general will, the will of the society arise? Rousseau says as follows: In the act of legislation, by the device of legislation in an autonomous citizen body. How is the situation? I have a certain selfish will, say, to pay no taxes. But this is just my private will and of no political consequence in itself. It becomes politically consequential only if it takes on the form of a law. Therefore I must stand up in the assembly and say: There ought to be a law to the effect that there ought to be no taxes. And then I can easily be persuaded, if I am not completely crazy and idiotic, that I will be most hurt by that law[29]—or at least as much as anyone else—and therefore that is unreasonable. What happens? I take my selfish desire and restrict it, by making this experiment—[x]

[1] Deleted "in--."
[2] Deleted "while there must be—."
[3] Moved "most."
[4] Deleted "it would be—."

[ix] Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. Hulme and Roth (New York: Collier Books, 1950). First published in French in 1908.
[x] There is a break in the tape at this point. In the transcript: "[experiment?]"

[5] Deleted “the.”
[6] Deleted “that.”
[7] Deleted “in the language of.”
[8] Deleted “which.”
[9] Deleted “except if.”
[10] Deleted “a.”
[11] Deleted “this takes—.”
[12] Deleted “of course not only—.”
[13] Deleted “is”
[14] Deleted “are wholly”
[15] Deleted “Hobbes”
[16] Deleted “of.”
[17] Deleted “That.”
[18] Deleted “in another—.”
[19] Deleted “then”
[20] Deleted “to take.”
[21] Deleted “In.”
[22] Deleted “don’t.”
[23] Deleted “a sketch of Locke’s, not.”
[24] Deleted “and”
[25] Deleted “never gives rise”
[26] Deleted “himself.”
[27] Deleted “Montesquieu.”
[28] Deleted “to the subject.”
[29] Deleted “So.”

Session 10: probable date, February 7, 1954
From Rousseau to Burke

Leo Strauss: [In progress] . . . self-restraint and so on. Now this fundamental change, the reduction to peacefulness, humanity, and benevolence we may say is the substantive principle of that novel moral teaching. It is implied in this doctrine that morality proper is derivative. The fundamental things are the basic wants, which appear in the moral sphere as rights. Morality, therefore, is enlightened self-interest and nothing else. This implies that the solution of the human problem requires nothing but enlightenment and the right kind of institutions. It does not require what we may call loosely but intelligently a conversion, a radical change of the orientation of man. Now institutions must of course be understood in a broad sense and not limited to legal and political institutions. Self-preservation requires food and other things of the same kind. This whole approach leads to a preponderance of economic considerations. There is an essential connection between modern natural right and what we can call "economism." They are twin brothers.

As for the difficulties to which I alluded last time, I divide them into two parts: (1) regarding enlightened self-interest, and (2) the right kind of institutions. Now enlightened self-interest means the primacy of the individual. The clearest theoretical expression of the primacy of the individual is the notion of the state of nature. By nature the individual is capable of making a social contract, just as two citizens may make a contract of business partnership. Yet the state of nature must be and is meant to be a state of presocial man. Yet these presocial men are meant to be rational men. How else could they make contracts? However, reason presupposes speech, and speech presupposes society. Therefore the state of nature, if it is to be presocial, must be prerational itself. The state of nature must be subhuman; and if this is so, then what later on came to be called "history" is necessarily superior to the state of nature, because history is a process by which man acquires humanity, and it is of course higher than the subhuman state.

Now this difficulty of the concept of the state of nature was brought out most clearly in the work of Rousseau. The difficulty was obscured for some time by the academic teaching which had taken over the concept of the state of nature. Here it was said that the state of nature was merely a hypothetical construction and did not refer to any actual part of history. This was a kind of academic makeshift. The classics of this teaching, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, took it for granted that the state of nature is an actual state of the past, possibly even of the future. The first difficulty to which the modern natural right doctrine is exposed on its own level is the doctrine of the state of nature.

Now let us consider the second point: the right kind of institutions. The right kind of institutions means institutions which are in conformity with natural right. This culminates in the demand that the right kind of institutions would be such institutions as would make superfluous any appeal from those institutions—that is to say, from the established order—to natural right, to something noninstituted. The classic case, again, is Rousseau's doctrine of the general will, which is in practice the will of the legal majority. As an ultimate consequence of Rousseau's doctrine, the general will, as the will of the majority, becomes unchallengeable. You cannot appeal from the

general will to natural right, because the general will is presupposed to be the only possible embodiment of natural right. The consequence may be called "totalitarianism," provided this is reasonably understood. Rousseau of course was not a totalitarian in the sense in which we use the term today, but there is a totalitarianism of society. What we call "totalitarianism" today is a totalitarianism of government, which is an entirely different sort of fish. I hope you see the difference. If you have no free elections, for example, you have for all practical purposes a totalitarian form of government. In Rousseau's scheme, there would always be free elections, but yet there would be a totalitarianism of society because there is no possibility of appeal from the will of the majority.

The end result of this whole development, both of the depreciation of the state of nature and of this absorption of natural right by the general will, was this. The depreciation of the state of nature means a depreciation of the right of nature, because the state of nature is the home of the right of nature. Moreover, this means the absolutization of the will of the majority or the will of the society. This end result is not identical with the view which we may call conventionalism, according to which there is nothing natural and no possibility of appealing from the established order to something beyond it, something natural. In this modern doctrine, especially in Rousseau, there is a specification still of what a respectable or just society is, say, a certain kind of direct democracy. Such a society is just according to natural right; therefore you cannot make any appeal from its will to something else. However, it does not apply to all societies indiscriminately, as it would according to the conventionalist doctrine of the past. The principle by virtue of which we recognize the just society is natural right, but natural right in its turn is inseparable from the state of nature. This has now become impossible because the state of nature proves to be subhuman.

In this situation, people were forced to try to find a principle which is altogether independent of human nature. The clearest form of that attempt is the idea of a formal ethics, to use the term coined by Kant. The path for this had already been prepared, especially by Rousseau. We may state this view as follows. That is right which is susceptible of generalization. More precisely, those maxims of man, of human actions, are right or just which are susceptible of generalization. Whether this leads to a way out is another question. I would like to make this clear, because I think this is a crucial point for the understanding of the problem of natural right. Up to 1800, roughly speaking, all moral, or philosophic moral doctrines were based on the nature of man. There was one fundamental difference. Either the nature of man must be understood as the completed man and therefore something like the perfection of man or virtue, or else it means the mere beginnings, meaning the fundamental wants, the fundamental character of man as it is available as it were from the moment of birth. Modern natural right tried to build the moral doctrine on the fundamental needs, fundamental wants alone, and disregarded the perfection of man. After this latter had failed, and after the former kind of natural right had been thrown out because of its allegedly utopian character, there seemed to be no further possibility of building a moral doctrine on the nature of man. One way, however, in which this could be attempted was this formal ethics, namely, in which the mere formal character of reasonableness or of rationality, generality, or universality seemed to be sufficient for guiding man.

The important question which we can only raise here is this: Is there a connection between the formal ethics and the substantive principle of modern natural right? The substantive principle

being peace, benevolence, humanity, sociality, or whatever you might call it. I am inclined to believe that there is one, but that would lead us much beyond our present discussion. I would like to remind you only of this simple scheme which I stated on a former occasion: the fundamental difference between the vertical limitation, as I called it, and the horizontal limitation of the arbitrary will—this ancient scheme, the Platonic-Aristotelian-Stoic scheme, and this typically modern scheme. This modern notion, we can say, is concerned with such limitations on the arbitrary will of man which are necessarily effective. The other one is not necessarily effective. This is so because[1] [these limitations] are rooted in the self-interest of others. If the limitation comes from above, from the perfection of man or virtue, there is, so to say, no one on earth who really cares for your being virtuous. However, if the limitation is rooted in the self-interest of everyone else, then the limitation is necessarily effective. One illustration from Locke's *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, near the beginning, paragraphs 8 to 9: "Every Man hath a Right to . . . be Executioner of the Law of Nature . . . this will seem a very strange Doctrine to some Men."[i] Now a "strange" doctrine means a novel doctrine. In the sense of that modern natural right doctrine, every man is the executioner of the law of nature. No wonder that the law of nature thus understood is effective. Why are the others the executioners? Because they are so very much concerned with the rule of virtue? No. Because they are concerned with their self-preservation. Because they are concerned with their self-preservation, they are concerned with peace. Therefore, they become by natural necessity the executioners of the law of nature. I must leave it at this and now turn to another subject.

Student: [. . .][ii]

LS: . . . as Burke called it, that which appealed to the unthinking multitude. That may have been a very simple doctrine, but there was something else. The older doctrine of natural right, the Platonic-Aristotelian, had become inseparable for practical purposes from the teaching of the Catholic Church. Therefore, in the Protestant countries there was a kind of desire to get a new natural right doctrine which was not bound up so much with the Aristotelian tradition. In connection with the religious wars, with the movement toward toleration and toward the secularized society, there was a kind of need for a doctrine which in the most simple way would substantiate this. These are among the more immediate causes for the successes of these doctrines. The evidence depends entirely on whether it is really evidently true that doctrines of this kind are more practical than the older doctrines. That I think is a crucial point. You come across this argument all the time. Modern doctrines are low but solid. They appeal to something which all men want: self-preservation with its corollaries—food, protection against arbitrary government, and so on. This is all we need. Of course, virtue and noble things we must have also, but they can shift for themselves. Nothing can be done regarding them. Fundamentally, the notion may be expressed as follows: If the fundamental wants of man are satisfied, the human problem is solved as far as it can be solved by human means. Within limits, this is reasonable and plausible; however, one has to think it through to see if it is really adequate. It is a much simpler doctrine, and therefore in its early stages, especially in Hobbes and Locke,[2] [it goes] together with the notion of a perfectly evident mathematical science of natural right. Doubtless the vulgar aspect is there, but it would be unfair to separate it and isolate it from the other aspects

[i] Locke, *Second Treatise*, secs. 8-9.

[ii] The transcriber notes that the question or remark was not recorded. This is the case with all questions or student remarks in this session.

that are present. It is a very simple doctrine which has amazing appeal, but which is of course blind to the complexities of the human problem, especially within civil society.

Student: [. . .]

LS: I don't believe that in those terms it is a fundamental question. What is really the difference? Take Hobbes. In what sense does Hobbes teach that man is by nature evil? In the sense that man will always be in need of forcible restraint. There must always be gallows, and jails, and other things if men are to behave decently. In case of the other extreme, Marx, man as man is capable of reaching a stage in which gallows and other institutions of this kind are completely meaningless. You can say, although this would be very untrue, that what Rousseau was trying at was this Marxian notion: a society without gallows and jails, where men really would behave without any compulsion. Rousseau of course never said that; he said that man in the state of nature, that stupid animal, was good, but once man has become a social being, the social passions are coeval with[3] [society] and then the need for repression arises. If you look from the practical point of view, the need[4] [for] gallows proves the evil in man. Rousseau actually agrees with Hobbes. In other words, you have to take a very extreme position, for instance like that of Marx or other anarchists, to arrive at this notion in relation to the question whether man is by nature good or bad. I really don't know when the question was initially raised in this form. Perhaps Rousseau is responsible for that by saying time and again that man is by nature good, by which he meant nothing more from a practical point of view than that man is so much perfectible that he is capable of being a citizen of a free society, nothing more. No abolition of gallows. Even the possibility of the abolition of war was very dubiously maintained. I believe it is a powerful popular slogan which is not very helpful for understanding the issues. This is to say nothing of the fact that ordinary experience would justify the view that some men are good and some men are bad.

Student: [. . .]

LS: I would only say this, that as long as this scientific determinism prevailed it was of course assumed that caprice can never be a fundamental fact. There must always be reasons for every action, no matter how seemingly capricious. Think of Freud! Of course, since we do not possess complete knowledge of all causes, we have to admit caprice as a commonsense term corresponding to some commonsense realities. For instance, if a woman wants this hat absolutely rather than another one, we may say this is caprice, because the other is more beautiful, etc. For practical purposes this is sufficient, but a perfect psychology might give a beautiful reason how this is connected with the Oedipus complex and I don't know what else.

Let me now turn to another subject inseparable from the ones we spoke of first, and that is Edmund Burke. Edmund Burke is a very powerful critic of modern natural right, a man who reasserted the older notion of natural right and yet in a very strange way did more to bury or to prepare the burial of natural right than anyone else at this time had done. I can give only a short summary and must refer you for a more elaborate analysis to the last section of my book.[iii] We must distinguish two elements of Burke's teaching. The first concerns a teaching regarding the right political order; the second concerns the manner of the establishment of the right political

[iii] *Natural Right and History*, 294 ff.

order. As for the right political order, that can be stated in one sentence: The right political order is the British Constitution, and further, the British Constitution as it existed in the year 1792. This means in theoretical terms it is a mixed regime. Burke applies to England what Cicero and Polybius had said about Rome. The mixed regime is fundamentally an aristocracy, meaning the decisive influence rests with the Senate, to use the language of Rome and the United States, and with the ruling group preferably lifelong members at that. In other words, Burke's notion of the right political order in itself explains his opposition to the democratic movements of Europe, especially in France, as preached by Paine. For Burke, the question of the right political order is inseparable from the manner of its establishment, if we may say so. The crucial point can be stated in one word: the right manner of establishing the political order is not revolutionary but reform, slow change. The classic case of handling constitutional problems according to Burke is 1688. In this most reasonable and conservative of all revolutions nothing was changed except a little addition: The succession goes on as usual, although with the qualification that it be the Protestant line. Otherwise, no change. In other words, the word which we must use, although Burke does not use it in a technical sense, is "conservative": conservative versus revolutionary or extreme.

If we link this up with our previous discussion of Burke, perhaps we can assert the following proportion: Burke is related to Paine as conservative aristocracy is related to revolutionary or radical democracy. We see our way already to Tocqueville. You know where Tocqueville is if you use these terms, which are not meaningless. If you use these terms, conservative and radical, aristocracy and democracy, what does Tocqueville teach? Conservative democracy. In other words, he takes the substance from Paine: democracy, but the mode from Burke: conservative. I would like to say that in the nineteenth century the crucial party division was, especially in Europe, the conservative and the liberal or progressive parties. I think that up to the present day you will find these terms still used. That is very strange, because here parties are distinguished not by their substantive goals but by their attitude toward change. In former times, in the seventeenth century, there was the great civil war in England. What[5] [were] the name[s] of the two parties? The royalists and the patriots. The king and the fatherland, with the latter holding that the king is at best simply the minister of the fatherland. There was then a substantive difference, and that was always so. There were aristocratic factions and democratic factions and so on all the time. Recall the medieval conflict between pope and emperor, etc.—always the substantive issue. In the nineteenth century, that is no longer as such in the forefront; it is a division which does not regard so much the facts but change, or the modes of change, slow or fast. That has a great deal to do with our problem today, because what we are concerned with is precisely a forgetting of the substantive issues,[6] [which are] pushed into the background as somehow uninteresting or unimportant compared with the formal question [of] how to change, and not so much in what direction to change, toward which goal to change. To anticipate what I might be able to develop in later lectures, let me return to this simple scheme which I projected for a course on the "isms." [LS writes on the blackboard][iv]

[iv] There was a break in the tape at this point. The transcript of the session on Burke continues in three additional fragments, marked in handwritten notation as 10B, 10C, and 10D. The first of these, 10B, follows immediately and is titled, "Portion of lecture on Burke: Probable date, February 7, 1954." Where the subsequent portions begin is indicated in further footnotes.

. . . aristocracy certainly, there is no doubt. But regarding the mode revolutionary, a revolutionary aristocracy, which is in a way a contradiction in terms, of course. We will come to that later. Really these two dualisms—aristocracy and democracy, extremism and moderate or conservative positions—are sufficient for a fundamental orientation up to the present day.

Now I will return to Burke. The right political order is mixed regime, beautifully exemplified by the British constitution. Burke gives an argument in defense of the British constitution against Paine's or Rousseau's democracies. The argument is given in terms of natural right, sometimes even in terms of the modern natural right doctrine of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. I mention only the central part of Burke's criticism of the modern doctrine: everyone has the right to self-preservation or to happiness. Does that make sense? If he has this right, he has of course a right to means conducive to self-preservation or happiness. Furthermore, common to Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau: he must then have the right to the judgment of the means of self-preservation.

In the most radical form of that doctrine, in Rousseau it is said that this right of judgment regarding the means must be preserved within civil society, if civil society is to be just. That means the only legitimate political order is direct democracy, in which each man has as much of a vote as everyone else. That means I am still, within the limits of the possible, the judge of the means of my self-preservation. In other words, in Rousseau and in Paine the consequence is drawn that if all men have by nature the right of judgment of the means of self-preservation and happiness, everyone must have the same share as everyone else in political power. That was a crucial consequence. That is questioned by Burke. He raises the question: Even assuming that everyone has as good judgment on the means of self-preservation and happiness in a state of nature, does this mean that everyone can have a good judgment on the means of self-preservation and happiness in civil society? In short, when the situation has become so enormously complex that the horse-sense needed for shifting in a state of nature would be absolutely insufficient. One may also state it as follows. Granting that everyone has by nature certain rights, these rights would then lead to a right within civil society: to good government, government which satisfies these fundamental wants. But why should good government be government by all or by many? No reason is forthcoming for that, at least no sufficient reason.

As Burke puts it, people are reasonably good judges regarding the existence of grievances—the shoes are pinching, everyone feels that—but if it comes to the question of the *causes* of grievances, not everyone is[7] a good judge. Long experience and great concentration on political matters is needed to acquire good judgment on the causes of grievances. For these and other reasons Burke speaks of imaginary rights of man. He does not altogether exclude that there are[8] rights of man. That is of no great importance, really. The fundamental facts according to him are our wants on the one hand, and our duties on the other. Therefore, he says, the foundation of government is not in "imaginary rights of men" but "in a provision for our wants, and in a conformity to our duties."[v] By this formulation Burke returns to the premodern understanding of natural right, in which the rights were understood in subordination to duties and, one might also say, to the wants.

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[v] See the references to Burke in Strauss's discussion in *Natural Right and History*, 298, n. 73.

The connection between Burke and premodern natural right is easily proven in one of his comments on the Irish question. He quotes Suárez explicitly, and this in effect means Thomas Aquinas. Now this must suffice here. For the argument regarding the right political order, the crucial point, to repeat, is the question of whether it makes sense to draw this conclusion: from the natural right of every one to be the judge of the means of his self-preservation to an equal share in political power. Burke says no, because the situation is radically changed the moment you live within civil society, within a very complex order; the judgment of the whole, the whole political order and its needs is no longer so much given to the ordinary man as it would be regarding his self-preservation as a particular citizen in his private affairs. Many people can take care reasonably well of their private affairs, avoiding jail, bankruptcy, etc., and yet are very poor judges of political matters. I think examples of that are found even among politically prominent people.

Now let me turn to the question of the manner of establishment of the right order, which is more important in the long run because what Burke says about the right political order and about natural right itself is not in any way original. It is fundamentally a restatement of older doctrine. These doctrines are frequently stated by Burke in a much more effective manner than by Schoolmen because he was such an enormously gifted orator. The substance of the teaching, however, is very old. Now to turn to the other question, I remind you of the problem. In the spirit of the premodern natural right doctrine, we must make a distinction between the legitimate and the best. That means there is no right whatever of reckless appeal from the established order to the best social order, for the established order, however imperfect, may be the best possible under the circumstances. In order to solve the fundamental political problem, the question of what is the right order here and now, you have to consider the circumstances. The human faculty which consists in considering circumstances was traditionally called prudence; therefore the chief light of political action is best given by prudence. Burke is forced to defend the principle of prudence, by which I mean he defends the principle that prudence, and prudence alone, can guide us in political and practical matters as against the denial of the principle of prudence.

The denial of the principle of prudence was called by Burke "speculatism." It is the same thing which I called on a former occasion "doctrinairism."[vi] It is the kind of approach underlying the doctrines of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Speculatism means the denial of the difference between theoretical knowledge and prudence. Since prudence is knowledge at home in practice, we may also say it is the denial of the difference between theory and practice. The phenomenon is familiar to all of you. There[9] [has been] a dream haunting social science for many generations, according to which prudence will be superseded in due time by social science. That's it. I mean, that is the most common form today of that. There will be a society in which the statesman does not any longer have to make prudential decisions with their peculiar uncertainty, but he simply will call upon social scientists and they will tell him what to do in a scientific and proper manner. Burke attacks this speculatism, or doctrinairism or scientism, in the name of prudence; and he implies, and does not only imply, that scientism, if I may use the term now in this sense, is inseparable from lack of prudence, which is intelligible because it denies prudence. That means it is inseparable from radicalism or extremism. By the way, this is still with us. I believe that there is a tradition practically inseparable from the tradition of scientific social science, and that is that of "social engineering," however you might call it, and all kinds of radical and extreme forms of

[vi] "Speculatism": see *Natural Right and History*, 302 ff.

political action. Let me read a passage from Burke. You will recognize some contemporary facts. The French revolutionists, the incarnation of the spirit of doctrinairism are:

"worse than indifferent about those feelings and habitudes, which are the support of the moral world . . . They consider men in their experiments, no more than they do mice in an air pump, or in a recipient of mephitic gas . . . They are ready to declare, that they do not think two thousand years too long a period for the good they pursue [therefore it doesn't make any difference whether in the meantime three million kulaks or so perish—LS] . . . Their humanity is not dissolved. They only give it a long prolongation . . . Their humanity is at the horizon, and, like the horizon, it always flies before them.[vii]

Another point. These French revolutionists, or their teachers, therefore depreciate the conventions of earlier gallantry and speak about love in a way which Burke says is "an unfashioned, indelicate, sour, gloomy, ferocious medley of pedantry and lewdness."[viii] I think this is a wonderful description of the scientific talk about sex, with which you are all familiar. What then is the connection between scientism on the one hand, and radicalism or extremism on the other? The scientific attitude means to step out of the human situation, to look at the human situation as if one were not a human being, from the outside. It means to look at men as at mice in an air pump. One abstracts from one's human feelings; one divests oneself of them, and of course one therefore ignores them in one's objects, the human beings one studies. I read to you a statement on this subject which just came to my attention in Kurt Riezler's Walgreen Lectures "Political Decisions in Modern Society," where I find this remark which I think is quite helpful.

"Scientific research done in public opinion institutes and elsewhere interprets the results of issue polls taken by pollsters. When we go through these interpretations we discover that according to these interpreters the respective opinions originate in and should be explained by emotion and interest. We will further discover that this interpretation is by no means borne out by the evidence. Some apparent support or some semblance of it comes to be because emotion and interest are undefined and are used in such a vague and wide sense that anything whatsoever is either emotion or interest. The interpreters know in advance of their interpretations that these two [emotion and interest—LS] are the sources of every opinion. They find nothing but their own miserable psychology, which has long since discarded reason. Reason does not play a role or is not allowed to play a role in the formation of opinion. Biological impulses and conditioned responses to stimuli—these are all that can be observed and verified and thus are scientifically real.

"How, if this is our idea of Man, can we tell the government that it should not identify the people with the masses, opinion with sentiment, and that it should appeal to reason. Yet that is just what we [meaning reasonable citizens—LS] must demand."[ix]

[vii] Burke, *A Letter to a Noble Lord* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1909-14). See Bartleby.com, paragraph 62: https://www.bartleby.com/24/4/4.html.
[viii] Burke, "Letter to a Member of the National Assembly," in *The Works of Edmund Burke*, Bohn's Standard Library, vol. 2 (London: George Bell and Sons, 1886), 540.
[ix] Kurt Riezler, "Political Decisions in Modern Society," *Ethics* 64 (1954): 1-55. Strauss reads a passage from pages 35-36.

Now to illustrate a little bit more what Burke means by his notion that scientism is identical with radicalism or extremism, and why this is fundamentally so even if in a given case a man happens to have a conservative temperament and therefore [makes] a good choice, there is this passage, written in the seventeenth century, in Spinoza's *Ethics*, where this whole thing begins: "Man must not be viewed as a state within the state [meaning as a being with a character of its own—LS], but he must be understood simply as a part of the whole."[x] Therefore, Spinoza continues, he is going to discuss the human passions or emotions like figures or planes—like a geometrician, as Burke would say. What is implied in this? The understanding sufficient for understanding inanimate and subhuman beings is sufficient for the understanding of human beings. This means, of course, to beg the decisive question. Up to this point, whenever Burke speaks of the importance of prudence against doctrinairism and/or scientism, he really does [no][xi] more than restore the older point of view. Sometimes he does this more effectively than the earlier writers, and yet the substance is the same. There is nevertheless, and this is a point of special interest to us, a fundamental difference between Burke and all his predecessors. Let me read a few passages.

"Our constitution is a prescriptive constitution; it is a constitution whose sole authority is, that it has existed time out of mind."[xii]

"[The British constitution claims and asserts the liberties of the British—LS] as an estate especially belonging to the people of this kingdom, without any reference whatever to any more general or prior right. "[xiii]

What does this mean? The sole authority of the British constitution is traced to its existence for time out of mind. Does this not amount to a denial of natural right? If you take a cannibal society as an extreme case, does it not have exactly the same authority, that it has existed for time out of mind? If the rights of Englishmen of which Burke speaks have no reference whatever to any rights higher than or prior to the British constitution, does this not mean a denial of natural right? That something of this kind has happened in Burke is shown by other considerations. In Burke, according to Burke's statement, political theory or philosophy becomes in fact nothing but a theory of the British Constitution. To state it in more general terms, political theory is nothing but an attempt to bring to light the latent . . . which prevails in actual institutions.

A generation after Burke, Hegel wrote his *Philosophy of Right*,[xiv] and in the preface to it he stated the new principle in sharper form than Burke did, but really he formulated only what

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[x] Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes (Dover Publications, 1951), part 3, "On the Origin and Nature of the Emotions," 128-29.

[xi] This phrase appears uncertain as to negation. It seems plausible that here Strauss means to say: "Up to this point . . . [Burke] really does *no* more than restore the older view . . . the substance is the same." This amendment is not certain, given the plausibility also of "really does more than restore." Strauss does, however, proceed to describe the important difference of Burke from his predecessors of the older point of view.

[xii] Burke, "Speech on Representation of the Commons in Parliament," in *The Works of Edmund Burke*, vol. 7 (Boston: Little Brown & Co, 1886), 94.

[xiii] Burke, *Reflections on the French Revolution* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, Harvard Classics vol. 24, part 3, 1909-14). See Bartleby.com, paragraph 55.

[xiv] *Philosophy of Right* (1820).

Burke had already done. Hegel said that up to now political philosophers had thought that they should teach the state, how it should be or ought to be. That is foolish presumption. Political philosophy can have no higher function but to understand the state as it is: the actual state. For, Hegel says, the ideal or rational is the actual; the actual is the real or the rational. Now that needs many qualifications, otherwise it would be simple absurdity. Burke comes almost to that point. In other words, we can say that in Burke we find one of the most important exponents of the view that natural right must be replaced by history. I will try to explain that. I would like to emphasize again that this is only part of Burke. Burke is a natural right teacher in the Thomistic style, one could say, as much as anyone else; there is also something else in Burke which is incompatible with this whole natural right tradition. I will limit myself exclusively to this novel aspect—the notion of history which emerges out of Burke's teaching. I will illustrate the difficulties by an observation about the literature on Burke. In most of the early literature on Burke in the nineteenth and twentieth century, Burke is taken as the great discoverer of history and of the historical approach, historical jurisprudence and so on. In a more recent book, in the preface to the selections from Burke which were in the Knopf book,[xv] we find no word about that. The assertion of the editors is that Burke is simply a Thomist. Both statements are equally true, which means that both are false if they claim to present the doctrine of Burke. Burke is a Thomist, one could say, but in that moment in which Thomism transforms itself into something wholly incompatible with Thomas.

We must try to understand that, specifically how history, as it is called, could seem to be a solution to the otherwise insoluble problem of natural right. What Burke says is this. The question concerns the manner of establishing, or the manner of coming into being of the right political order. The right political order must have come into being in a process which imitates the natural process. That is to say, it must be a continuous process not guided by reflection. If you look at the growth of a tree or of a puppy, or even of a human being, you see that it is a continuous process not guided by reflection. Of course the coming into being of the right political order cannot be a natural process proper, because human beings have to deliberate and reflect all the time in political life. What precisely does this mean? Burke says this: It is only an imitation of a natural process. What precisely does this imitation consist of? Some order, say, a tribal order, exists at a given time. [Then a] new situation arises. People handle that situation as it arises as well as they can. This changes the situation. New difficulties come, new modifications and so on, but always with the preservation of continuity. The overall result of the whole development is in no way intended, so the whole process is not guided by reflection. I hope that is clear. Another example. When Plato wrote his *Republic*, he did not of course think that he was writing a classic for Western civilization, but it happened to become that. Similarly, when some English king of the Middle Ages devised a certain fiscal measure in order to get out of a fix, he did not foresee and he could not have foreseen what this meant in the long run for the English constitution as it developed gradually.

I would like to comment on why this is so important, that a process which imitates natural processes is an indispensable condition for political goodness. To see that, we must contrast it directly and without any subterfuge with the opposite, I mean with the classical point of view. According to the classics, the right political order in substance was not so greatly different from

[xv] Perhaps *Burke's Politics: Selected Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. Hoffman and Levack (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949).

what Burke thought. As you see, Cicero's Rome and Burke's England are not so greatly different. The basic difference is commerce. There is no commerce in Rome and much commerce in England; apart from that, there is no great difference. The right order is an order according to nature, but it comes into being of course by deliberate action and planning. It may also come into being by some accident, but that is not so good, because accident is not as trustworthy as reason. It comes into being by deliberate action and planning if the circumstances are favorable, if chance is favorable. Otherwise we will have a variety of more or less imperfect solutions. We need then practical wisdom, consideration of circumstances, in addition to sound theory.

We now come to natural constitutional law, which means modern natural right, as we have discussed. There is one solution valid for all times and places. There is no need to consider circumstances: just open Rousseau and see what he says about the best society and apply it. Here the difference between theory and practice is abolished in the decisive respect. We may say, exaggerating a bit—but we have to, in order to clarify this—that political or social science becomes here purely theoretical. The solution valid for all times and places.[xvi]

[1] Deleted "they."
[2] Deleted "going."
[3] Deleted "it."
[4] Deleted "of."
[5] Deleted "was."
[6] Deleted "This is."
[7] Moved "any more."
[8] Deleted "not."
[9] Deleted "is."

[xvi] The portion of the transcript on Burke that is labelled 10B ends here.

Portion of lecture on Burke:[i] **no date**
Burke on Natural Right

Leo Strauss: . . . How can [the] emergence of knowledge of the right social order be a necessary process? As for the answer, I think you all know it too well: if the intellectual process is necessarily progressive. That, under given conditions, made sense. Therefore, if the intellect necessarily progresses, it must really then reach a point where this full knowledge is possible—at least it has a great probability. So we have then this state of affairs: intellectual progress leading to discovery of the right social order, leading then to diffusion of knowledge of the right social order. That means public opinion becomes enlightened, and that is already the actualization of the right social order. That was the scheme as it developed generally in the eighteenth century; it was developed at least in the eighteenth century. Intellectual progress was exemplified most clearly by progress in natural science. Intellectual progress leads then to the discovery of the right social order. This discovery, made by some great individuals, is diffused by publication of books. The diffusion of this knowledge enlightens public opinion and therewith the right order is already actualized. I mean, a little pushing is necessary, but for all practical purposes it is all over but the shouting.

There is this difficulty, however. In this scheme everything depends on intellect or reason. Reason progresses, reason discovers the right order—reason in fact establishes it. Yet this whole doctrine, which Hobbes himself developed, teaches one thing with the greatest emphasis, namely,[1] [that] reason is derivative: the fundamental facts are things like sensations and bodily wants or what have you. It is for this reason that the progressive process must be understood ultimately as a natural process, because of the derivative character of reason. It cannot be natural, strictly speaking, so it must be quasi-natural. The conclusion is inevitable: the establishment of the right order is a process not guided by reason. That was prepared in a more limited fashion by a man who was a very great authority for Burke, namely, Adam Smith. Burke's adherence to Adam Smith's teaching is the most simple proof of the fact that Burke was not a Thomist. No Thomist could ever say that lucre is a good principle of civil society.

Now what did Smith teach, stated as simply as possible? Social harmony is a natural product in the sense of a product not intended by anyone. It[2] is [just] mass points, moving mechanics. It does not work teleologically. They just follow a law, so the individual mass points, men, pull through their whole self-interest. Out of that unintended but natural necessity, social harmony emerges. Now the question arises, of course: If this is the natural product, this harmony, then it should always be actual. To which the answer is obvious: There would always be this social harmony but for human stupidity. Men in their stupidity interfere; governments make restrictive laws and this kind of thing, and therefore we don't have it. But that is of course not a sufficient answer because, since this stupidity is so common and so general—and so universal up to now, as a matter of fact—is it not also in its way natural? We must say at least that the natural order in

[i] This portion of the transcript of a session on Burke is labelled "10C" and titled "Portion of lecture on Burke: Feb-March, 1954; Natural Right Course."

the sense of Adam Smith requires for its actualization *The Wealth of Nations*.[ii] In other words, Adam Smith is as important as natural necessity in order to get that harmony; in other words, reason makes an absolutely decisive contribution[3] [to] the actualization of the natural order, reason as embodied in *The Wealth of Nations*. Then a further question arises: What about the genesis of Adam Smith's thought itself? Is this accidental? Might this not also be understood as the product of a natural process?

Now let us return from this to Burke. The right social order emerges without any theory; in other words, the emergence of the right social order has exactly the same character as Smith's social harmony. You see, not everything which happens is of course good. But everything which happens, if left alone, is good. The Smithean order—the system of supply and demand, shall we say—if left alone, is good. All economic wickedness comes from not leaving it alone. All political goodness arises from[4] leaving alone this natural process; all political evil comes from interfering with this natural process. Now the right order emerges without any theory to guide it, that's the crucial point. The theory which deserves the name "theory," the true theory, comes afterwards in Burke. Theory is therefore concerned with the product of completed practice. Theory is not concerned with guiding practice except in secondary matters. Theory follows practice. The practice is the building up of these enormous edifices—the British constitution—and this was not guided by theory. If theory follows practice, theory must be inferior to practice. On the other hand, the highest form of practice, the foundation of society and especially of a really good society, is exempted from practice proper, meaning from reasonable planning. It is a growth rather than the work of man, this which was regarded by the classics as the highest form of practice, the foundation of society. Then comes the purely theoretical theme. That is the background, it seems to me, from which we must understand Burke's turn toward history. It is, I think, an inevitable consequence given the premises elaborated in the seventeenth century.

Student: [. . .]

LS: Why is it purely a theoretical theme? Because constitutions can't be made, as the famous formula runs, they can only grow. Now if they can't be made, they are only a theoretical theme.

Student: [. . .]

LS: That is denied. If they grow, or quasi-grow, which is the same thing, then what you can do is only to look at them and understand them. You cannot make them. Practically this means something which is in itself subject to human deliberation and action.

Student: How is this reconciled with Burke's need for the aristocracy because they have the leisure to become wise?

LS: That is only practical wisdom in the simple sense of the term. In other words, you can say matters of policy, not broad policy—that is perfectly intelligible on Burke's basis—but the whole, the crucial points, that may be explained in the following manner. Burke is frequently praised, and quite rightly, as the great exponent of conservatism. But this is not a very great thing

[ii] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, vol. 1 & 2, ed. R. H. Campbell & A. S. Skinner (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982).

in itself, because until at least 1600 all political thinkers were conservatives—at least this was so of all political thinkers of any consequence. What Burke did was only to restate in an eloquent and forceful way the principles of prudence and moderation in a period in which these principles were flaunted in the way in which they had never been flaunted.

But now something else happens. There is an almost insensible shift from a return to Aristotelian sobriety—moreover, to something which doesn't exist in Aristotle: history. We must try to consider this. It seemed for a time that history was the ideal vehicle of conservative politics. Why? Because what Burke called this quasi-natural process, continuity not guided by reflection, that is what history came to mean in the first place. In other words, if that is the character of history, then to act historically means to act wisely. But then people found out very soon that this was not true: that there are radical changes, horrible discontinuities, and that they are as much historical as the continuities. Take such an extreme example as Marx. Marx is in his way as historical as Burke was. If we look merely at history, there are such radical shifts: it has happened before; it could happen again. Therefore the question of the concept of history is not of course limited to Burke and the particular use he made of it, the conservative use, but has to do with this general characteristic of nineteenth- and twentieth-century thought, that the place of nature and of natural right is taken over by history. In this context, Burke played a very great role. Now if we analyze Burke's thought in his own terms, we see the starting point is not the discovery of history, of the charms and inwardness of it, but a much more sober point. It is a rediscovery of the fact that practice and therefore practical wisdom, or prudence, are irreducible to theory. This in itself has nothing to do with history. The great question is, and it is difficult to answer: Why did the recovery of the primacy, at least the relative independence, of practice take on the form of a discovery of history? It's very strange.

Student: [Question regarding the possible effects of Christian influence here][iii]

LS: Yes, but in this respect there is nothing Christian. There is just the old Aristotelian doctrine of prudence, which he restates, and then this remark that continuous process is not guided by reflection as superior to human contrivance.

Student: [. . .]

LS: I believe that is not the point. There is some possibility that there was a Christian, or more generally speaking, biblical inference behind it, but that has to do with something else: the whole notion of divine providence governing the affairs of man. There is a great gap between the traditional doctrine and the use made of it explicitly by Hegel later on, and partly by Burke himself—I mean that according to the theological concept of providence, the ways of God are not scrutable to man. But in this modern doctrine as it has been developed by Hegel, the ways of God are perfectly scrutable to man. He knows the meaning of history; that is, if he uses history at all, it means of course we cannot know the meaning of history, but we know what this particular historical event or change means within the divine expectations. I don't believe that we can understand the genesis of this notion by starting from theology; I believe it is much simpler to understand it from this modern concern with understanding everything from the standpoint of its

[iii] As noted by the transcriber.

genesis. Genesis here meaning mechanical causation, nonteleological causation. I believe that gives us everything we need to understand Burke.

I would like to illustrate this problem with which we are concerned as follows. In the classical notion a distinction was made between theory and practice, and it was understood that theory occupied the higher place. One could add a number of footnotes, but I must omit them now. Theory is the highest, but within this practice and prudence have a relative autonomy. The position which we find in the seventeenth century in Hobbes and in others, Descartes and others, is that the distinction between theory and practice is in fact denied. Doctrinairism or scientism emerged, which means that at least as a possibility, and as a serious possibility, we can look forward to a situation in which the place of prudence will be taken over by science. Theory absorbs prudence. This leads to many difficulties. A reaction to it takes place in which the independence of practice is asserted in an extreme form, not only the relative autonomy of practice but the primacy of practice, the supremacy of practice. Since all practical matters are particulars, here and now, that means that all universals must be understood ultimately as derivative from particulars. Now what does this mean? Natural right: universal. But this is simply a reflection of a certain unique situation, say, the Greek *polis* at that time, and so on.

We have what is called today existentialism. This is the most extreme form which has hitherto appeared of this, the primacy of practice, and where we can say that practice absorbed theory. Theory is no longer intelligible as such. Now in this process, in the process which leads from the doctrinairism or scientism of the early modern period to the existentialism of the present time, Burke played a significant role. It is important to realize that this is really, in spite of the opposition, a fundamentally continuous process. Certain basic premises have not been questioned on that way.

Student: [Question with reference to contemplation][iv]

LS: Of course it is an activity and not a state of dormancy, contemplation. Theory means concern with something or some things which are not subject to human action, the premise being that in all actions, however far-reaching and however venerable, in order to be reasonable there must be certain things presupposed which are not subject[5] [to] action. For example, take the Declaration of Independence. This action presupposes, according to Thomas Jefferson and the others, that there are certain natural rights, rights which are not made and are not subject to human manipulation or reproduction in any way. Without this, their whole activity would be meaningless. Or to state it differently, from a point of view more easily intelligible today: If man could have complete control of nature, could be quasi-omnipotent, then he would not know what he should do with that power because the ends themselves would be subjects of manipulation. If there is not something in existence which is not subject to manipulation, deliberation, then action, human life is meaningless. That was the older view. Therefore there must be something higher in dignity which is not subject to action, which can only be the object of contemplation, understanding, whatever you might call it.

Student: [. . .]

[iv] As noted by the transcriber.

LS: Yes, they were in themselves transpolitical. You raise now the question, if I understand it correctly: What is from this point of view the status of political philosophy or political theory as it was understood heretofore? This is of course a very important question. The answer is simple. It is fundamentally that political theory or political philosophy is not theoretical, strictly speaking. It partakes of the character of all practical thinking, and that was called deliberative. When you read Plato's *Republic,* if the translations were good you would see that Socrates frequently uses the term "deliberation." He and Glaucon deliberate. Now of course it is not a deliberation proper, because deliberation proper means to deliberate about what we shall do here and now. The status of political theory can be described as deliberative at a second remove.[v] It does not abandon the orientation of the practical man, but it is somehow aloof from it. One can state it as follows. If this is the horizon of the statesman, what Plato and Aristotle thought is that[6] [the political philosopher] looks in the same direction but farther afield. Statesmen look in the same direction and are fundamentally guided by the same intention. If the function of the statesman is to guide society in an intelligent and humane way, if that is the essence of the statesman, then it is of the essence of the political philosopher, too. He only is capable for certain reasons of taking a broader range, but the point of view, the attitude, is fundamentally the same. Now in the moment you get a purely theoretical approach, then it means that the approach and the intention of the political theorist has nothing to do with the attitude of the statesman. It is fundamentally the same as the attitude of the theoretical physicist, and that leads to difficulties. Let me quote one sentence from Aristotle: "Human nature is slavish in many ways."[vi] In other words, there are so many predicaments under which we suffer: climate, poverty, also stupidity.

Student: Burke appears to be speaking against the stupidity that culminated in French Revolution. Doesn't he have a right to do this?

LS: No. The point is this. Stupidity is a complex and varied phenomenon. The stupidity of Condorcet[vii] or the other revolutionists was an entirely different stupidity from that which Burke had in mind. Condorcet meant they simply couldn't put two and two together to see that their self-interest dictated this action. From Burke's point of view, the very attitude of Condorcet is not the only form of stupidity. Lord North's[viii] stupidity was an entirely different one. He would say that of all politically relevant stupidities—that is what Burke really says—this which is in common through Lord North and the French revolutionaries is the most important. That he calls "speculatism." What does he mean by that? I mean, in other words, what has Lord North in common with Condorcet? Answer: Lack of prudence—not the one due to passion, but a specific danger to which the human mind is necessarily prone: in short, to believe that one can find the solution to a practical problem in any universal principle alone.

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[v] In the transcript: "(at a second remove?)."
[vi] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1095b19-22.
[vii] Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794), mathematician, philosopher, secretary of the French Academy of Science, and active in drafting legislation (particularly on public education and constitutional reform) during the French revolution. He was a member of the liberal Girondin group, which was expelled from the Convention during the period of Jacobin repression.
[viii] Fredrick North, Lord North (1732-1892), 2nd Earl of Guilford, Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1770-1782. For a description of his failings as a statesman, see http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/north-frederick-1732-92.

Now what were the principles of the French Revolution? In the simplest form, they are the rights of man. The [principle of the] rights of man demands democracy. That's all there is to it; no further reflection is needed. What did Lord North say? Sovereignty of the British Parliament: that's the only issue, and that must be asserted. Whether it would be extremely foolish to assert it now, that prudential question didn't enter. I think here Burke is himself the victim of theory in his singleminded concentration on this particular kind of stupidity, i.e., that the greatest danger, perhaps the only danger are abstract principles, as it were. But there are obviously others; for example, there is a kind of overestimation of[7] one's forces, powers, which is the source of many political stupidities at all times which has nothing to do with abstract principles.[ix]

. . . for political action than those stated by Paine, and to take a very extreme case, even those stated by Rousseau. I would certainly admit that there is a kind of theoretical failure of Burke which leads him to this notion of continuity. In other words, this quasi-natural character of the most important political action, of which I spoke.

Student: [. . .]

LS: That is of course a difficult question, because Burke was naturally a politician and he considered always the immediate effects of his speech. Now if he would have admitted in 1792 that there was room for improvement, that would have been unwise; but earlier, when the situation was not as grave, he gave a certain criticism, no doubt. For instance, there is the famous document on the economic reform, where he was extremely critical of the established order.[x] But regarding such an important political issue as the "rotten boroughs," he felt: Hands off!

Student: But from the point of view essentially of his philosophy?

LS: Well, now there were certain things where he absolutely wanted improvement, as, for example, his concern with religious toleration: the position of the Irish, and of the Catholics generally speaking, he found impossible and he wanted to change that. To that extent, yes, but the broad political set-up—hereditary monarchy, the peerage, the House of Commons based on this kind of virtual representation, as it was called, with the real independence of the Member of Parliament over against the electorate; you know, the famous thing—these ideas I think he regarded as final. What he could not exclude, of course, and what he made full allowance for was this. The overall situation of the world might change so much that the British constitution would have to be modified, but I don't believe that he would have regarded this as improvement. The kind[s] of improvement which he visualized are clearly recognizable. They concerned especially toleration, full toleration—but with the established church, naturally—and no development toward democracy. The democratic element in the British constitution is the House of Commons. And that must be very strong; it must be real[ly] safe, but it should have no broader basis. I see no trace of any desire for such . . .

Student: This seems to conflict, when you say that he seems to say that this is the best . . .

[ix] This is the end of what is marked in the transcript as 10C; the start of 10D immediately follows.

[x] Strauss is probably referring to Burke's famous "Speech on Economical Reform" of 1780.

LS: Perhaps ultimately, but could not one argue as follows. We have this order in Britain. Now what do men really want, reasonably want, in a civil society? They could list a final number of reasonable objectives.[xi] To what extent can they be had? Certain things are simply impossible for moral beings. And we have some help in answering that question by comparing the British constitution with any other constitution, say, the Roman constitution, to say nothing of the French. Even a Frenchman, Montesquieu, said: Look at the British constitution; that's the answer. Why should Burke, an MP, be less satisfied with the British constitution than was Montesquieu, a French lawyer? There seems to be no doubt about this. Now of course there are infinite possibilities of improvement in details; for example, such things[8] [as] Hasting's administration must not happen, and changes might be brought about in the Colonial Office so that these things cannot happen again.[xii] But these changes do not affect in any way the fundamental structure of the constitution, if you know what I mean.

There are in Burke some statements, quite a few statements more favorable to democracy, especially in his earlier writings; for instance, when the House of Commons were threatened—I believe it was threatened—by the policy of King George.[xiii] But he made it perfectly clear that he always started with the threatened part of the constitution, so he was more democratic in 1770 than he really was in his heart of hearts, and also he was more royalistic in 1792 when the kingly element was threatened, but I think that this is the position he kept throughout his life. In short, he felt that the mixed constitution, the British form, is the best he knows of. Every change would be a retreat and not an improvement. You could get more democracy, but then you would lose certain things. You would lose this experienced ruling stratum, which would lead to great dangers in the continuity of foreign policy, and also other important political themes.

Student: Wouldn't he be inconsistent though if he made that assertion, so that if he lived today, he would have to defend the British democracy in much the same terms as he defended the aristocracy?

LS: Yes, that is a very relevant question. I would say that to the extent to which Burke follows the ancient tradition, the classical tradition, including Thomas Aquinas, he was perfectly consistent. There is the other side, however. Let me read that to you. At the end of his *Thoughts on the French Revolution*,[xiv] which I believe was written in 1793, he says:

"It would be presumption in me to do more than to make a case. Many things occur. But as they, like all political measures, depend on dispositions, tempers, means, and external circumstances, for all their effect, not being well assured of these, I do not know how to let loose any speculations of mine on the subject. The evil is stated, in my opinion, as it exists. [The evil of the

[xi] In the transcript: "objectives (?)"

[xii] Warren Hastings was appointed governor of Bengal by the East India Company in 1772. He exercised arbitrary power in a corrupt administration, but efforts of the Company's board of directors to remove him were unsuccessful. Burke was instrumental in an effort to impeach Hastings and spoke against him in Parliament. See, e.g., Edmund Burke, Speech in Opening the Impeachment of Warren Hastings, Esq., 15th February 1788.

[xiii] Strauss might be referring to Burke's speech "On American Taxation," April 19, 1774.

[xiv] Strauss refers to Burke's *Thoughts on French Affairs*, written in 1791, the year after his more famous *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

French Revolution is an abomination, such as never before existed—LS][xv] The remedy must be where power, wisdom and information I hope are more united with good intentions than they can be with me. I have done with this subject, I believe forever. It has given me many anxious moments for the last two years. If a great change is to be made in human affairs, the minds of men will be fitted to it; the better opinions and feelings will draw that way. Every fear, every hope, will forward it; and then they who persist in opposing this mighty current in human affairs, will appear rather to resist the decrees of Providence itself, than the mere designs of men. They will not be resolute and firm, but perverse and obstinate."[xvi]

What does that mean, this last part of the paragraph? If a great change has been made in human affairs, what can this mean—I would say, but the French Revolution, and the principles of the French Revolution. Now if that is so, resistance to it means to resist the decrees of providence itself. That's strange, isn't it? In other words, Burke, on the best of his knowledge, opposes the French Revolution as unqualifiedly evil. The language which any one of us today could use against the Bolshevik Revolution could not surpass in ruthlessness and utter lack of qualification Burke's language. Then, however, he goes on to say that maybe providence decrees that. That is your point. I believe that is what he means. By reading that statement we have already made our transition to Tocqueville, because where Burke stops, Tocqueville begins.

Tocqueville assumes that we now know what the decree of providence is: democracy. Furthermore, we have to live with it and to make the best of it. That is really the Burkean spirit again. You see that history has these two implications. First, it can be used purely conservatively, and that was what Burke primarily intended; but it also has a second meaning, a rather sinister meaning, I would say, that we must accept every wave of the future. We have to [accept it] simply as the best we know. I think Burke comes close to that. As long as people were sure, although God knows how, that this history, this historical process,[9] [was] progressive essentially—progressive implying a movement toward something better—then it was easy to accept it. It was the duty of every decent man. But the moment that becomes doubtful, then we can't leave it at history. We have to find some standards absolutely independent of history, not touchable by history. That is of course the question. Burke naturally still had such standards. He accepted natural right, there is no doubt about that, but he also paved the way for this fundamental change because initially he was really a captive of his enemies: a doctrinaire conservatism, meaning this, that a kind of policy which is normally sound—conservative policy, moderate—is not always sound. In opposing the revolutionary principles of the French Revolution, Burke asserted equally radically a conservatism that forced him to find a kind of metaphysical principle for it, and that was history. Next time we will consider how Tocqueville tries to settle the conflict between Burke and Paine by accepting democracy but imbuing it with the moderate spirit of Burke.

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[1] Deleted "the."
[2] Moved "just."
[3] Deleted "for."
[4] Deleted "not."

[xv] This phrase in brackets is not in the text. Though the transcript does not show that this is Strauss's interpolation, it appears that it is so.
[xvi] Burke, *Thoughts on French Affairs*, in *The Works of Edmund Burke*, 7th ed., 12 vols. (Boston: Little & Brown, 1881), vol. 4, 377.

[5] Deleted “of.”
[6] Deleted “he.”
[7] Deleted “over-estimating.”
[8] Deleted “like.”
[9] Deleted “is.”

Session 11: February 15, 1954
Burke and Tocqueville on America and the French Revolution

Leo Strauss: I would like to make clear what I was doing, and I will try to state it in the simplest possible form—and therefore in a form which I beg you not to quote—as only in a conversational way. Now I would say that the three greatest events in the history of political philosophy—and even beyond that, perhaps—are first, political philosophy in its original form, which means Plato, Aristotle (we don't make any subtle distinction here); second,[1] natural constitutional law, which is most clearly represented by Hobbes and Locke; and[2] third,[3] the emergence of history, of which we find a particularly important example in the teaching of Edmund Burke. Now these two modern approaches, natural constitutional law and history, are today frequently explained as secularization of biblical doctrine. This question was brought up to me by Mr. Burckhart[i] and perhaps this is in the mind of other students as well. I would like to say why I do not take this approach.

Now what does secularization mean? I believe people mean by it the notion that man's redemption should take place in this life by human means, whereas according to the original notion man's redemption would not take place certainly by human means. Now that such phenomena—frequently called today political or social religions or ideologies—exist is undeniable, but the question to me is whether that is understood properly by being called secularization. Now secularization in this sense means, in the first place, rejection of the biblical doctrine. So it is not simply a kind of sublimation of biblical doctrine but a rejection of it. And secondly, it is a question whether this rejection can be understood only on a basis of the biblical doctrine or as a modification of the biblical doctrine.

Let me explain. Redemption of man in this life by human means. That is nothing characteristically modern. All of you are supposed to have read Plato's *Republic*. What do you find there but a redemption of man in this life by human means? Evil will not cease from the cities, and neither cities nor individuals will be perfectly satisfied and legitimately satisfied[4] [unless] the philosophers are kings and the kings are philosophers. What does this mean but (if we use the religious term) redemption, redemption of men in this life by human means? In general, in classical political philosophy the establishment of the social order which is most conducive to man's perfection is meant to be the final word on this subject, and this was *the* problem of classical political philosophy. Yet there is one crucial limitation. In classical political philosophy the redemption, if we may use now the biblical term, or the actualization of the best order depends on chance; and this in religious language means on inscrutable providence. So it would seem then that Plato's *Republic* does not, so to speak, give us quite the redemption of man in this life by human means, because the solution depends on something which is absolutely beyond human control: what the Greek philosophers called *chance* and what in the language of theology is called *providence*.

[i] Strauss's reference to "the mind of other students" suggests that he is referring to a student here. There was no Mr. Burckhart registered for the course.

But then we have to raise this question: Why was this crucial qualification, namely, that actualization depends on chance, questioned, and by whom was it questioned? And to this we have a very simple answer and one which needs argument, but I must simply dogmatically state it now. It was questioned by Machiavelli, of whose[ii] tendency I have spoken before. The only point which I would like to make now is this: that it is absolutely impossible to understand Machiavelli's doctrine, which fundamentally disposes of that element of chance, as the secularization of the biblical teaching. I know that attempts [of this kind] have been made,[5] but they are impossible and can easily be refuted, I think.

Now let us go one step further. There is a kinship between Machiavelli's teaching and a grave event which started only a century after Machiavelli. That was the emergence of modern natural science. Modern natural science made certain fundamental assumptions of Machiavelli more evident than they had been in Machiavelli's own time, and in the context of Machiavelli's own teaching. In the first place, what Machiavelli implied was the disregard of the end of man. Now this modern natural science was fundamentally antiteleological, meaning the[6] [denial] that there are natural ends of beings in general, and of man in particular. That was the first point. The second point was the determinism growing with the modern natural science; as a consequence of that, quite a few evil things, e.g., envy, avarice, etc., were regarded as necessary, and therefore of course not subject to moral blame. So this modern natural science supplied, we might say, a foundation for Machiavelli's rejection of [the] classical teaching, which Machiavelli did not yet have at his disposal.

If this is so, and if the later thinkers like Hobbes presuppose that modern natural science, the question would be this. If we want to understand modern political thought as a secularized version of biblical thought, we would have to trace modern natural science in its specific character to the Bible. Again, attempts of this kind have been made and are being made, but they are not convincing, at least not to me. Almost any other explanation is more plausible than that. Now what is reasonable in the contention that such a secularization has taken place? I would say this: an unconscious switching from a religious understanding of certain phenomena to a fundamentally nonreligious understanding. Such a switching could take place only on the part of more or less thoughtless people. People who knew what the Bible meant and understood it fully could never have accepted the so-called secularization of the biblical teaching as a genuine interpretation. That [. . .] into which these more or less thoughtless people switched, however, and in modern thought, was created not by thoughtless half-theologians but by men of an entirely different stand[ing], namely, the heroes of modern philosophy. Taking this general view, I am forced of course to try to understand the genesis of the history of the modern historical consciousness or sense out of the secular premises which are not to be conceived of as a product of a process of secularization. And this I was trying to do last time: to show from the example of Burke how the switch to an historical understanding, whatever that may mean, took place on the basis of certain premises clearly visible in the modern natural science and its application to social phenomena.

I would like to restate what I said last time. According to the interpretation which I regard as wrong, the emergence of the modern historical consciousness is understood as the secularization of the biblical doctrine, but in this case the construction is very simple. The Greek philosophy or

[ii] There is a question mark in the transcript here.

classical philosophy altogether was strictly speaking a product of its own intention: nonhistorical or transhistorical. That may be misinterpretation, error, but that is what they wanted: not a teaching for Greece in the fourth century, but a teaching for man as man valid for all times which only happened to be discovered by some Greeks at that time. But that is merely academic; [it] has nothing to do with the truth, nor is it significant for the teaching. The teaching of men like Hobbes and Locke still has this transhistorical claim and character. That has radically changed in the nineteenth and twentieth century, where practically every teaching, at least every interesting important teaching, is accompanied by a historical consciousness, meaning an awareness that this teaching is not universal but is related to specific time, as is very clear in the case of Hegel and Marx. Now Burke plays a great role in this connection.

How is this usually construed? If you read the Bible, contrasting it with Greek philosophy, then it seems in the Bible that history is still written very large. Especially in the Old Testament one can see it so clearly: the story of what is done now, and where and when. And these happenings or changes of the situation are of crucial importance and are absolutely decisive, e.g., "before the Fall, after the Fall," so that what was true before the Fall was not true after the Fall, and so on and so on. Later on this was developed, and people sometimes say that Augustine's *City of God* is a philosophy of history or theology of history. And in the thirteenth century, a pupil of Francis of Assisi, Joachim de Fiori, developed a doctrine of three stages corresponding to the three persons of the Trinity. Three periods of history were conceived; the third, the Age of the Holy Ghost, coming at the end as a culmination.[iii] It seems closest to the Marxist or Hegelian construction: stage one, stage two, and a third or final completing stage. The Hegelian, Marxist, or perhaps Rousseauan construction is a secularized version of Joachim de Fiori's theology of history. That is, I think, today almost a generally accepted view, if I know the literature sufficiently, about the genesis of this consciousness.

I don't believe, for the reasons I indicated, that this is really helpful. The problem in a way begs the question in speaking of history by speaking of its application to the Old Testament, or Bible in general. How would this be called, what we, heirs to the modern tradition, call history? How this would be called in terms of the Bible is an extremely difficult question. *Règle générale*: If people regard something as very important, they find a word for it. Either it exists in a language or they coin it. There is no Hebrew word for history. So no prophet, or Old Testament prophet, who are claimed to be concerned with history, could possibly have thought about it. They spoke about Nebuchadenezzar and other political events which now are called historical, but obviously from a different point of view. The key word is rather "righteousness" in the Old Testament history. You can say that is merely philology, but I think the principle is not philological. People always—and especially first-rate people—always succeed in finding a term for what they regard as most important. What people call history now would perhaps be the deeds of God. That you can say, that this is what the Bible presents. But there is a very long way from the deeds of God

[iii] Joachim de Fiori (c. 1135-1202), an important apocalyptic thinker of the medieval period. He devised the three eras of history in his commentary on the book of Revelation, or the book of the apocalypse. The Old Testament was the time of the Father, the New Testament the time of the son, and the time of the Holy Spirit an era of the Church on earth.

to what we call history, and we produce a simplistic sham solution by establishing a direct connection between the Bible and the modern historical consciousness.[iv]

I was forced to point out that I could have arrived at a conclusion only by neglecting completely the problem of the difference between the Bible and Plato. In this connection, I haven't looked at the thing for many years, but I believe it was purely an argument *ad hominem*, an argument which I would not regard as developed. It is impossible to understand Plato and Aristotle if one doesn't see a fundamental difference between their teaching and the biblical teaching . . . In a very radical sense, that is exactly the difference between the Bible and Plato. One can say this: For Plato—I can state this only in somewhat enigmatic form—everyone knows that Plato threw out the poets from his best polity. Now that has many, many meanings, as everything in Plato has. Perhaps the deepest meaning is this: that there is something fundamentally wrong about *poesis* in the most fundamental sense. *Poesis* means the notion that some making is the most fundamental thing is the fundamental error, from Plato's point of view; and the other expression of that is that the highest things are the unmade ideas.

Let us turn to Burke. The point I made is this: that Burke's whole work, as far as its importance from a fundamental-teleological point of view, is contained in a tract on modern natural right in the sense analyzed in the name of two fundamentally different principles: (a) premodern natural right, as I called it, which was accessible to Burke in many ways but directly even through Thomas Aquinas, and (b) in the name of history. A simple exemplification of the latter: Rights of Englishmen versus rights of man. I would like to explain the latter point, this notion of history which is not yet developed in Burke but which we can see emerging in his pages. I return to modern natural right and its original basis in Machiavelli. The quest for an ideal, we can say, whose actualization is probable, if not necessary: this requires that the end of man, virtual perfection, is replaced by the beginnings, as I called them, meaning by them fundamental wants or urges. Self-preservation is the simplest example. There are no ends by nature. From this point of view, as we saw in Hobbes especially, natural law is no longer the rule of virtue proper, guided by an understanding of mental perfection, but natural law is conclusions of theorems from the fundamental urges, from the beginnings, these beginnings alone being effective.

But natural law which prescribes peace and decency is not effective. Natural law itself is, in the words of Locke, a creature of the understanding; and that means something derivative and not in itself effective. It means, in other words, that the state, or society, has a radically artificial character. By nature there are only isolated individuals, and they create artificially, by the social contract, the state. The whole enterprise implies a deliberate and conscious break with nature or a revolt against nature, e.g., the very term "state of nature" proves this. That is the natural state. It is bad—at least very "inconvenient," in the polite language of John Locke.[v] And what we want is the civil state, which is an artifact of man and nothing else. In the most radical versions, the same thought means that man's being a human being is acquired and not a gift of nature. In other words, not only virtue is acquired—that goes without saying—but being man is acquired. Again, clearest in Hobbes: What is the characteristic feature of man? How do they say it today? Handling of verbal symbols—"speech," as Hobbes calls it in a somewhat more intelligible

[iv] The transcriber notes: "(Question here cut out.)" The student's question was presumably inaudible or not recorded.

[v] *Second Treatise*, sec. 13.

language. Speech is an invention of man. And by this Hobbes does not mean the individual languages, which everyone always said were inventions, but in a more radical way, speech as speech is a human invention. And that means humanity is acquired by man.

Now this position has certain difficulties. In the first place, how do we understand the revolt of man against nature? Or in more simple language: How can we understand the transition from state of nature to a state of civil society? Is it not necessary to understand that transition as a larger process? That was the inevitable consequence of the new natural science as espoused by Hobbes. The new natural science must explain the transition from a presocial life to a new social life, and this transition must have not a teleological character, because there are no natural things. It must be understood in purely causal terms, meaning in terms of mechanical causation. Man does not leave the state of nature because his soul yearns for some perfection which is not available in the state of nature, but he is forced out of it. Example from Rousseau: overpopulation. The simple peaceful life of the beginning was no longer possible; then bloodshed; then one had to make arrangements to get out of that. No *end*, as it were. The second difficulty is this. If we take Hobbes's scheme as the simplest and clearest scheme, we see that the discovery of the true political teaching, namely, Hobbes's teaching, of course, is an accident. It is *the* true teaching, but that it was discovered now by Hobbes is accidental. It[7] [could] have been discovered two thousand years earlier by some Greek, Persian, or Hindu. Now this creates a great difficulty: If the understanding of the true political order is accidental, then the actualization of the true political order is also accidental, because the actualization of the right order presupposes, naturally, knowledge of the right order. In other words, we are back where we were prior to modern philosophy: that the actualization of the right order depends on accident.

The solution which was found to these difficulties, by Rousseau more than by anyone else, especially in his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, was this: There is a strictly mechanical process leading from the state of nature to human life, and this culminated in the discovery of the true public right of the true political teaching. In other words, a progressive scheme is generally known, but I believe somewhat more precisely stated. This we might presuppose if we want to understand Burke, i.e., what he opposes was developed already in 1755 or so. There is only a short step from the discovery of the truth to the actualization in practice. That is a matter of enlightenment, education, and a bit of shrewdness. Let us then assume that this is the background of the political teaching of Rousseau as given in his *Social Contract*, and therefore also of Paine's *Rights of Man* which is a popularized and somewhat cruder version.

Student: Why does this mechanical process leading from the state of nature necessarily culminate in the discovery of the true political teaching?

LS: I don't know. And I think the utmost we can say here is: We have it now. You have the discovery of the true teaching, something like a political Euclid. This political Euclid is represented in and presented to you in Rousseau's *Social Contract*. And Rousseau says: Look at it just as you look at Euclid, and see whether I am not absolutely correct, whether I do not start from self-evident premises and arrive by self-evident reasoning, and arrive at self-evident conclusions. Here we are. Why this must have been, there is no answer to that. I think we never get a real answer to that, though it is always of importance. Let us look at Marx, where you have

the famous statement, "Mankind does not pose itself any problems which it cannot solve."[vi] Why? In order to present some good-natured optimism. But I think what Rousseau would say is this: He has the true political system: people are necessarily dissatisfied, theoretically and practically, until they have found that. It is, in other words, a kind of hidden teleology which is nevertheless visible. I would say at this stage I think this problem is not faced.

Student: Do you find a relationship between conditions which exist at any particular point in this progression of man?

LS: Yes, in a very general way. Condorcet sketches that, but only . . . at the time of the French Revolution he was a victim of the Terror, and he wrote a book, a historical picture of the problem of the human mind, in which he goes into greater detail.[vii] These schemes elaborated in the eighteenth century were generally very true, but the nineteenth century devoted nearly all its energy to make this progressive scheme really concrete and convincing in detail. But the fundamental notion is there.

Student: [Question on chance.][viii]

LS: Chance is unimportant. That is the way Hegel and Marx solved that.

Student: Possible, but unimportant?

LS: No, it is actual all the time, e.g., in the communist analysis of Marxism, that is monopoly capitalism in a certain decadent stage. That it takes the form of German Nazism, or Italian Fascism, or Francoism, that is accidental, that's chance. That is unimportant; the real thing is to see the connection with monopoly capitalism.

Student: But the whole phenomenon of fascism was inevitable?

LS: Yes, it was inevitable, but it couldn't be foreseen. A dying social order is trying to defend itself by hook or [by] crook, and if the old legal means don't succeed, then we try extralegal means. To be a subhuman, we have from Rousseau, and humanity has proved to [have] be[en] acquired by man's efforts. These stupid animals, as Rousseau calls man in the state of nature, became human by their own efforts; they were not so by nature. Now if that is so, common sense dictates that we admit that we owe the best not to nature but to the human past: to the efforts of our ancestors, to tradition. The consequence which any sane man would draw from this is that we must cherish that tradition and not reject it or despise it as the revolutionists did. In this whole development from Hobbes on it was assumed that reason is weak or derivative. The fundamental

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[vi] Presumably Strauss's translation. Strauss refers to this statement of Marx in his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: "Hence humanity only sets itself such problems as it is able to solve." See *Marx: Later Political Writings*, trans. Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996),160.

[vii] Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, *Outlines of an historical view of the progress of the human mind* (1795), available online at: http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/condorcet-outlines-of-an-historical-view-of-the-progress-of-the-human-mind

[viii] As noted by the transcriber.

things are the passions, the natural needs, etc. Reason is [their] servant[8] and developed later, especially in Rousseau. [A] natural process leads up to the discovery of political truth. After that discovery, however, reason so weak and so [. . .][ix] is to become the mistress of men's fundamental wants. Man becomes more and more reasonable in the process of trying to satisfy his wants, but then a stage is reached where reason herself controls men's lives. To which the counterargument of Burke can be stated as follows: If reason is derivative, she can never become the mistress. And that means that the actualization of the good political order must itself be the product not of reason but of a natural process, a growth. Constitutions are not made, they grow. Constitutions cannot be made, they grow. That was the crucial thesis and is so very striking because this thesis developed shortly after the greatest constitution-making which ever took place, in fact the most efficient which ever took place, the American one.

In a phase of this experience, it was asserted that a new insight was the most important discovery made in the French Revolution: that constitutions cannot be made. And that was the crucial thesis of Burke. That is the meaning of his thesis that the establishment of the right order must be an imitation of nature, meaning—because it cannot be a natural process properly speaking—that deliberation and reason enters in at every phase. But it is a quasi-natural process. It must have the character of continuous growth, and the whole process must not be one supervised by human reason. That part of the story, this turn to the notion that the actualization of the right order must be the product of a quasi-natural process or growth, was the most important contribution which Burke made to the development of the idea of history in the nineteenth century. And that is very clearly prepared by Burke, and what I tried to show was how this notion is really in one sense a more radical formulation of the same principle which the French revolutionaries have accepted. In other words, the rationalism of the French revolutionaries is in a deep contrast to the fundamental question of the [. . .][x] of reason.

In the popular literature of the eighteenth century, the development is known as rationalism; everyone knows that. Now that is of course a very ambiguous term. What does rationalism really mean? It had originally a very simple meaning which is today however completely forgotten, and that[9] [was] the notion that human reason—unassisted reason, as it was called—is capable of leading man to his happiness. In other words, man does not need revelation. This was the meaning of rationalism for a small party, i.e., in every generation there were a hundred men who were rationalists in this sense, but they are unremembered. Therefore we call the eighteenth century the age of rationalism. But Plato and Aristotle were rationalists in this sense, too. The question is to define the precise character of that modern rationalism.[10] In one sense, a belief in the power of reason is much greater in the eighteenth century than it was in Plato and Aristotle. In what sense did, say, Hobbes and Rousseau have a stronger faith in the power of reason than Plato and Aristotle had?

Student: [Question on enlightened self-interest][xi]

LS: No, I meant something more superficial, more Marxist.

[ix] The transcript has a question mark.
[x] The transcript has a blank space with a question mark.
[xi] As noted by the transcriber.

Student: That reason could get control?

LS: *Chance*!! In other words, in Plato and Aristotle their rationalism was perfectly compatible with an admission of the great power of chance. To be proved empirically by the method today, take an example from Xenophon: You happen to be excellent in the art of agriculture, and therefore you are likely to be the best farmer in the world. But that doesn't mean of course that you will be a successful farmer: there may be very bad climatic conditions which ruin your harvest. Or you may be an expert in the art of matchmaking, finding the right woman for the right man, and you may fail absolutely in your own case. And Socrates was the great example of that. Because of chance, [there are] things which are unforeseeable and uncontrollable.

But perhaps Hobbes is most important for the establishment of the right order. You can know what the right order is with perfect clarity, and that has no relation whatsoever to its actualization, except that it is a condition of its actualization. You can never get the right actual order if you don't know, but your knowledge itself is a necessary but by no means a sufficient condition. Now modern rationalism assumes that the power of chance is, so to speak, negligible as compared with knowledge. So here the power of reason seems to be much greater, but that is only one side. The other side is that reason is to be regarded as much weaker than it was by Plato and Aristotle. Reason is a servant of the fundamental wants and passions. Reason comes later, strictly speaking. Reason is derivative. It is by nature nothing. Its emergence depends entirely on nonreason—accidental—yet at the end it will become all-powerful. If you look at the Marxist construction, you still see it. What Marx called the jump from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom is exactly that. The realm of necessity means one in which reason is not in control; necessity controls. Then a stage is reached where this poor stupid creature, compared to the solid substructure . . . There was a discussion going on in recent years in Soviet Russia whether the emergence of this new order, the Bolshevik order, did not make the superstructure now the regular thing. That was of course promised by Marx. Something of this kind is implied in all these doctrines.

Now there is one difficulty here. If the actual order must be the product of a growth and cannot be made, is not *everything* which exists natural? Do we not abandon every possible standard of judgment by accepting every product as a natural process? The answer is: No, because men like Hobbes and Rousseau themselves make a distinction between the state of nature and civil society, and they admit by making this distinction that man may alienate himself from nature. For what else is the transition from the state of nature to civil society except an alienation from the state of nature? Or in other words, man can interfere with nature; that is admitted in the very distinction. But as Hobbes and Rousseau say, this interference with or alienation from [nature] is good. Burke says it is bad. To act wisely means not to interfere with nature. In other words, we do have a kind of standard, namely, all those political arrangements are bad which are based on interference with nature, which come into being through theory. The political and moral error is less wickedness, or passion, or selfishness, etc. than abstract principles, doctrinairism. I don't deny that.

A trust in the historical process rather than in "abstract principles": I think we recognize now some contemporary phenomena in this formulation. We are therefore not surprised to find at the end of Burke's thoughts about French affairs a statement which reads like an acceptance of the

French Revolution—an extraordinary statement, a paradoxical statement. Burke was satisfied that the French Revolution was radically evil, and yet he accepted it. Why? Because it is, one could almost say, the way of the future. In a religious interpretation, God speaks in favor of the French Revolution and we have to accept it as possibility. The moral judgment gives way to a historical judgment. So in religious language, we must not deceive ourselves, because no religious man who knew what he was thinking would have accepted this Burkean conclusion. Think of some early Christians confronted by paganism [. . .][xii] became emperor, and Christianity seemed to be losing. To say, "It is God's verdict; let us become pagans again"—I think it is crazy to assume that. And fundamentally the same thing is taken in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as no longer crazy, the belief in the fundamental soundness of the historical process.

Tocqueville, living two generations after Burke, accepted modern democracy on a Burkean basis without accepting all the [. . .][xiii] of natural religion. That is the starting point of Tocqueville. Tocqueville was here[xiv] for a very short time, making some inquiries for the French government. The result of his observations was these remarkable two volumes. I believe that no book comparable in breadth and depth has ever been produced afterwards. I believe in no other case in regard to any other country that a man after such a short sojourn in a country could give such a comprehensive and profound analysis. Tocqueville had of course an excellent teacher: Montesquieu. Those familiar with Montesquieu's turn[s] of phrase recognize the master immediately in the work of the pupil. I think the next great book of this kind was Lord Bryce's *Modern Democracy*,[xv] but that is not comparable in depth to Tocqueville's book, though it may be correct in many points where Tocqueville was wrong. But Tocqueville still has the heritage of a great eighteenth-century philosophic analysis. Now Tocqueville accepts the verdict of providence. Providence has decided in favor of democracy. He makes an important distinction between the sane and moderate democracy which we find in the United States and the revolutionary extremist democracy which justly aroused the ire of Edmund Burke. In other words, America shows to Europe its own future; and therefore, for a respectable possibility for Europe, we have to understand America. I cannot touch on Tocqueville's analysis of American institutions. They are very important; even if obsolete in particulars, the fundamental principles are still of utmost interest. I must forego all this and turn to his analysis of democracy.

By the way, one great difficulty in studying Tocqueville is that he speaks of democracy in America, and he thinks of course of democracy in general. Sometimes the features are absolutely American and not exportable. In other cases, he speaks of [. . .][xvi] things and the reader himself must make the distinction between the typically democratic and the peculiarly American. Now what is his analysis of the democratic spirit?[xvii]

[xii] The transcript has a question mark here.
[xiii] The transcript has a question mark here.
[xiv] That is, in America.
[xv] James Bryce (1st Viscount Bryce), *Modern Democracies* (1921).
[xvi] The transcript has a question mark here.
[xvii] The transcriber notes that Strauss reads from the Henry Reeve translation of *Democracy in America*. Since we have been unable to obtain a copy of the Reeve translation edition used by Strauss (Oxford University Press, World's Classics, 1947), page references are to the widely-available translation by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (University of Chicago Press, 2002). Because of the availability of multiple editions in multiple languages, we have provided volume, book, and chapter in the footnotes; page numbers refer to the Mansfield and Winthrop edition.

"In democratic ages, men rarely sacrifice themselves for one another; but they display general compassion for the members of the human race. They inflict no useless ills; and are happy to relieve the griefs of others, when they can do so without much hurting themselves; they are not disinterested, but they are humane.

"Although the Americans [meaning the typically democratic nation—LS] have in a manner reduced egotism[xviii] to a social and philosophical theory, they are nevertheless extremely open to compassion.[xix]

"When an American asks for the co-operation of his fellow citizens, it is seldom refused; and I have often seen it afforded spontaneously, and with great good-will . . . All this is not in contradiction to what I have said before on the subject of individualism. The two things are so far from combating each other, that I can see how they agree. Equality of conditions [that means democracy—LS], whilst it makes men feel their independence, shows them their own weakness: they are free, but exposed to a thousand accidents; and experience soon teaches them that, though they do not habitually require the assistance of others, a time almost always comes when they cannot do without it . . .

"In democracies, no great benefits are conferred, but good offices are constantly rendered; a man seldom displays self-devotion, but all men are ready to be of service to one another."[xx]

Now what does that mean? What he finds characteristic of the democratic temper is a combination of systematic egotism, as he calls it, with compassion. Now systematic egotism means individuals pursuing their own version of happiness. This is a very remarkable remark—this doctrine which presents to interpret American democracy and actually restates the doctrine of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In other words, that is a very interesting problem for this kind of book. Tocqueville came here, obviously an excellent observer, and at the same time he had in his head a certain notion of what democracy is from the French democratic tradition, especially Rousseau. It is important to find out whether he was not sometimes misled by his preconceived notions of democracy in his observations. It was stated by Rousseau from the very beginning that it is a fundamental structure of man's nature: systematic egotism plus compassion; self-preservation mitigated by compassion. And this leads to a softening of manners—to general human sympathy, compassion, but not to great devotion or self-sacrifice. The reason is this: democracy means equality, equality of condition, i.e., there are no castes or aristocracy. Equality means independence of the individual. He is not bound by status, by family, etc., and therefore he is also not protected by them. The individuals are aware of their weakness, and that makes them compassionate. Equality means everyone is the judge: everyone is the judge of the need for self-preservation.

In practical terms, that means that the father ceases to have authority. That struck Tocqueville very much in this country, [the] great familiarity between parents and children. Now you have

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[xviii] In original: "egotism."
[xix] *Democracy in America* (hereafter *DA*), 2. 3.1, 539-541.
[xx] *DA*, 2. 3.4, 544-545.

this fully developed psychological doctrine: the autocratic and the democratic father; therefore greater warmth of natural feelings than in aristocratic families. Also equality of the children among themselves, which you would not find in societies of primogeniture, because there the oldest son would be a kind of tyrant eating up his young brothers and sisters. So democracy strengthens the natural sentiments, whereas it weakens those sentiments which originate in convention.

It would be a [. . .] analysis to determine what is really observation and what is inference from Rousseau. Equality furthermore means higher status of women: they become more independent, more reasonable, but, the Frenchman adds, lose charm and imagination. Furthermore, everyone has a higher opinion of his personal worth, and that leads to a gravity and seriousness which he finds altogether alien to the old world. That, I believe, is an observation that is no longer so. Gravity impressed him. He meant all the sturdy citizen virtues, e.g., the town hall and responsibility of the individual citizen, but it has also a certain defect.

"In democracies men are never stationary; a thousand chances waft them to and fro, and their life is always the sport of unforeseen[xxi] circumstances. Thus, they are often obliged to do things which they have imperfectly learned, to say things which they imperfectly understand, and to devote themselves to work for which they are unprepared by long apprenticeship. In aristocracies, every man has one sole object, which he unceasingly pursues; but— [it means a levelling, but this is not just a disposal, a caste distinction, but a levelling of the whole of the human aspiration—LS].

"The first thing which strikes a traveller in the United States is the innumerable multitude of those who seek to throw off[xxii] their original condition [in other words, the enormous mobility—LS]; and the second is the rarity of lofty ambition to be observed in the midst of the universally ambitious stir of society."[xxiii]

An enormous mobility and therefore a much greater prevalence of ambition than in an aristocratic society, but on the other hand a leveling of lofty ambition. This is connected with the preoccupation [with the present] which is inevitable in such a society, such as the family[11] [losing] their cohesion. Therefore [preoccupation] with satisfaction with the present, meaning present small families, parents and children, not the prospect of many generations as in the older form of society, leading to a kind of absorption in the present, lack of prospective, lack of lofty ambition. What is the prospect?

"Amidst the ruins which surround me [meaning in Europe, 1848—LS] shall I dare to say that revolutions are not what I most fear for coming generations?[xxiv] If men continue to shut themselves more closely within the narrow circle of domestic interests, and to live upon that kind of excitement; it is to be apprehended that they may ultimately become inaccessible to those great and powerful emotions which perturb nations, but which develop them and recruit them.

[xxi] In original: "or (so to speak) contemporaneous."
[xxii] In the Reeve edition of 1863: "emerge from." Either Strauss's Reeve edition of 1947 includes such revisions or Strauss himself alters the translation, though the latter appears improbable in this case.
[xxiii] *DA*, 2. 3.19, 599-604.
[xxiv] In the transcript, the passage is abridged. The missing portion has been supplied here.

"When property becomes so fluctuating, and the love of property so restless and so ardent, I cannot but fear that men may arrive at such a state as to regard every new theory as a peril, every innovation as an irksome toil, every social improvement as a stepping-stone to revolution, and so refuse to move altogether for fear of being moved too far. I dread, and I confess it, lest they should at last so entirely give way to a cowardly love of present enjoyment, as to lose sight of the interests of their future selves and those of their descendants; and prefer to glide along the easy current of life, rather than to make, when it is necessary, a strong and sudden effort to a higher purpose.

"It is believed by some that modern society will be ever changing its aspect; for myself, I fear that it will ultimately be too invariably fixed in the same institutions, the same prejudices, the same manners, so that mankind will be stopped and circumscribed; that the mind will swing backwards and forwards forever, without begetting fresh ideas; that man will waste his strength in bootless and solitary trifling; and, though in continual motion, that humanity will cease to advance."[xxv]

LS: I don't want to bore you with quotations all the time, but it is of course simply necessary [for every student of political science to read] Tocqueville's work.[12] We can also state [that] what Tocqueville *feels* in regard to democracy was the rule of mediocrity, or the substitution of quantity for quality, which then became on the political level a stock topic for European criticism of America, but is here meant not as a criticism [of America] but of democracy. There is one section however to which I should like to call your attention, because it is of some interest to us as students of the sciences.

"The greater part of the men who constitute these [democratic—LS] nations are extremely eager in the pursuit of actual and physical gratification. As they are always dissatisfied with the position which they occupy, and are always free to leave it, they think of nothing but the means of changing their fortune, or increasing it. To minds thus predisposed, every new method which leads by a shorter road to wealth, every machine which spares labor, every instrument which diminishes the cost of production, every discovery which facilitates pleasures or augments them, seems to be the grandest effort of the human intellect. It is chiefly from these motives that a democratic people addicts itself to scientific pursuits,—that it understands and respects them. In aristocratic ages, science is more particularly called upon to furnish gratification to the mind; in democracies, to the body . . .

"In a community thus organized; it may easily be conceived that the human mind may be led insensibly to the neglect of theory; and that it is urged, on the contrary, with unparalleled energy, to the applications of science, or at least to that portion of theoretical science which is necessary to those who make such applications. [And he sees in that a very grave danger for the human mind—LS]"[xxvi]

Now this whole analysis, of which I could give you only some specimens (and others might be equally [demonstrable] as those which I have selected) shows us that—and that is why he is so important to us in our present context—Tocqueville's analysis is guided, as every analysis must

[xxv] *DA*, 2. 3. 21, 616-617.
[xxvi] *DA*, 2. 1.10, 436-437.

be, by an awareness of alternatives. But whereas in present-day analyses of democracy the alternatives considered are usually communism and fascism—that is to say, to put it mildly, most unattractive alternatives from which we learn nothing except self-complacency—Tocqueville contrasts democracy with a respectable alternative, and that is what makes him so valuable. The respectable alternative is called by him aristocracy and is in practice the *ancien régime*, the prerevolutionary regime at its best. Without considering these passages, one simply can't understand what Tocqueville means. I believe also that these passages will show[13] you the persistence of identically the same problem throughout the times, so that the fundamental point of view of Tocqueville is one which we can easily understand, and with which we are familiar.

"I have already shown . . . by what means the democratic people[xxvii] almost always [and to repeat, "the United States" never means in these passages America; it means "democractic nation"—LS] manage to combine their advantage with that of their fellow-citizens: my present purpose is to point out the general rule which enables them to do so. In the United States, hardly anybody talks of the beauty of virtue, but they maintain that virtue is useful, and prove it every day. The American moralists do not profess that men ought to sacrifice themselves for their fellow creatures *because* it is noble to make such sacrifices; but they boldly aver that such sacrifices are as necessary to him who imposes them upon himself, as to him for whose sake they are made . . .

"The Americans, on the contrary, are fond of explaining almost all the actions of their lives by the principle of interest rightly understood [that is, the principle of enlightened selfishness—LS]; they show with complacency how an enlightened regard for themselves constantly prompts them to assist each other, and inclines them willingly to sacrifice a portion of their time and property to the welfare of the state. In this respect, I think they frequently fail to do themselves justice; for in the United States, as well as elsewhere, people are sometimes seen to give way to those distinterested and spontaneous impulses which are natural to man: but the Americans seldom allow that they yield to emotions of this kind; they are more anxious to do honor to their philosophy than to themselves.

"The principle of interest rightly understood is not a lofty one, but it is clear and sure. It does not aim at mighty objects, but it attains without excessive exertion all those at which it aims. As it lies within the reach of all capacities, every one can without difficulty apprehend and retain it. By its admirable conformity to human weakness, it easily obtains great dominion; nor is that domain precarious, since the principle checks one personal interest by another, and uses, to direct the passions, the very same instrument which excites them." [xxviii]

LS: By the way, you will see that the themes which Tocqueville brings up as observed in practice are all familiar from theory for centuries prior to Tocqueville's visit to the United States. In other words, the least one would have to say is that certain principles theoretically developed in the seventeenth century were actualized in the United States in the nineteenth century and the late eighteenth century—which, by the way, is not fantastic: if you think of enlightened self-interest, we think of Benjamin Franklin. There is a very clear line from Europe to some of the American founding fathers, whereas Tocqueville is constantly inclined to minimize the

[xxvii] In original: "the inhabitants of the United States"
[xxviii] *DA*, 2. 2. 8, 501-503.

importance of theory and to explain the prevalence of these feelings entirely as a consequence of equality of conditions, what we may call the sociological character.[xxix] He thinks [that] a fundamental change in social conditions has occurred that leads to certain theories, and the theories are mere byproducts of the social change; whereas it is in this case equally demonstrable that the theories are older than the conditions of which Tocqueville speaks and may be said to have brought about these conditions. But this only in passing.

Now what then is the principle with which Tocqueville is concerned, the[14] principle distinguishing democracy from aristocracy? Enlightened self-interest versus virtue. That is a theme which goes through the whole book. Enlightened self-interest—that means of course concern with comfort, with reasonable comfort. That means furthermore a love of material pleasures, but wisely tempered. In other words, in America this does not lead, as it does in corrupt Europe, to dissoluteness. And Tocqueville has many words of high praise for the great moral restraint, especially in sexual matters, by Americans.

"Some physical gratifications cannot be indulged in without crime; from such they strictly abstain. The enjoyment of others is sanctioned by religion and morality; to these the heart, the imagination, and life itself, are unreservedly given up; till, in snatching at these lesser gifts, men lose sight of those more precious possessions which constitute the glory and the greatness of mankind. [What he fears is this—LS] The reproach I address to the principle of equality is not that it leads men away in the pursuit of forbidden enjoyments, but that it absorbs them wholly in quest of those which are allowed. By these means, a kind of virtuous materialism may ultimately be established in the world, which would not corrupt, but enervate, the soul, and noiselessly unbend its spring of action."[xxx]

We may say that what he is afraid of is that it certainly does not lead to dissoluteness in the vulgar sense of the term, but the principle of enlightened self-interest might lead to an obfuscation of the highest things in human life, or to what we call colloquially philistinism. Love of material pleasures, a necessary consequence of the principle of enlightened self-interest, leads to restlessness, a secret restlessness, and to that seriousness which I have mentioned before. However, it has also its other side. The love of material pleasures is the spur to commerce and industry, and there is the necessary connection, observed before Tocqueville by Montesquieu especially, between commerce and industry on the one hand and political liberty on the other. Yet even here, when we see the greatest virtue of this new temper we see a danger, because there is a possible conflict between liberty and the desire for riches, as Tocqueville calls it in a somewhat old-fashioned language: namely, the desire for riches in itself leads much more naturally to the demand for order at[15] [any] price—in other words, to political apathy—than to political liberty. Tocqueville reflecting very carefully about this matter and giving a sketch of the possible danger, namely, the new despotism, [saw] not a despotism of the kind of Nero, [which] he does not believe would come, but a kind of paternalistic welfare state: that was the great nightmare, in which there would be no longer any spirit of liberty and of true rugged individualism.

[xxix] In the transcript: "character (?)"
[xxx] *DA*, 2. 2. 11, 508-509.

What is the corrective? The corrective to political apathy and to the moral vices which political apathy has as its roots is to realize the inadequacy of the principle of enlightened self-interest. Tocqueville uses very simple and old-fashioned language: If people don't believe in life after death or in the immortality of the soul, they are bound to fall victims to that materialism; and it is that very materialism which is bound to be fatal to democracy. In other words, what Tocqueville says: An areligious or irreligious democracy is bound to perish; and he meant by this not that vague religion—or what is sometimes called vague religion, namely, that enthusiasm for fine things—but a specific dogma. The crucial point is the immortality of the soul. Spiritualism is the term which he uses. How can spiritualism be preserved in a democracy? That is the question. And that is answered: By scrupulous practice of religious morality in public affairs. But he sees also the other side, that the age of democracy is also necessarily the age of incredulity and skepticism. There is another point which Tocqueville makes, which perhaps is better known than anything else in Tocqueville at the present day, [regarding] another consequence of the principle of equality. I must read to you this passage; it is one of the earliest observations of its kind. Equality means that everyone is the judge. But we can't leave it at that, because men obviously need intellectual authority.

"Men living at these aristocratic periods are . . . naturally induced to shape their opinions by the standard of a superior person, or class of persons, whilst they are averse to recognize the infallibility of the mass of the people. The contrary takes places in ages of equality.

"[D]emocracy would extinguish that liberty of the mind to which a democratic social condition is favorable; so that, after having broken all the bondage once imposed it by ranks or by men, the human mind would be closely fettered to the general will of the greatest number."[xxxi]

In other words, everyone is independent in a democratic society in the sense defined by Tocqueville, but weak. *All* are omnipotent; the mass becomes the intellectual authority. That he regards as the greatest danger. In this connection, I mention also his reference to the fact that in a mobile or dynamic society, lack of leisure is the normal situation—which means little time for thinking about subjects which are not of a practical nature. I think that you will recognize a number of contemporary facts not only in America but in modern democracy in general which Tocqueville discerns by contrasting modern democracy with its immediate antecedent, the European aristocracy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

We have to subject Tocqueville's general position—I am not concerned with the details here—to a searching criticism. I will do that next time. I would like to find out whether I made clear the main points. I remind you of the simple scheme with which I started, which I believe is helpful, but I was thinking of the present problems, of the problems discussed now in political science, the problem in the "isms" course. You have a clear distinction between positions taken by Burke and Paine. I remind you of that: conservative aristocracy versus revolutionary democracy. Tocqueville is, we can say, the greatest, the classic of a conservative democracy. He accepts democracy, democratic institutions, the democratic temper, but combines that with the spirit of moderate, conservative, evolutionist, however it you call it, and definitely antirevolutionary democracy. All of what we call liberal democracy today has never been so soberly analyzed, and so sympathetically, as it was by Tocqueville. When we take the extreme position of

[xxxi] *DA,* 2. 1. 2, 409-410.

revolutionary democracy, as presented by Marxism, and then we take the alternative, radical or extremist aristocracy (of course that is a contradiction in terms), that is presented by Nietzsche. These are the two positions which we have to discuss after we have seen what is the real difficulty in Tocqueville's position. I must leave it to your own work and also to other course[s] in this department to see whether more recent developments of democratic theory have successfully disposed of the difficulties of which Tocqueville has been aware. I would only say this, that when I turn to such a theorist of democracy as John Dewey, I believe that so far from disposing of Tocqueville's criticisms of the[16] [dangers inherent in] modern democracy, he is only a striking exponent of these difficulties.

I could develop this more fully next time, but for now I only want to know whether I made clear the main points which I think in the first place is not proper for this course, but which students of Tocqueville must consider: [first], the enormous power of the tradition of democratic theory over the mind of Tocqueville, which tradition guided, and perhaps misdirected in important points, Tocqueville's observation of what happened in this country; and the second point, which is connected with the first, is a criticism of Tocqueville's explicit position. It is the notion that democratic temper, the democratic principles as indicated, is a consequence of the social change effected, and not the other way around: that the democratic temper, the democratic principles, really *antedate* the existence of democratic societies by generations. I would put it this way. At the present time, we have a vogue of conservatism, as you probably know. Conservatism is now the fashion, which doesn't say that it is wrong—I personally have always been conservative, but I begin to loathe [it] after the nonsense which is frequently written about that. Burke of course is really now presented, owing to this fashion, as *the* conservative. And he is a conservative all right, but everyone was, so to speak, conservative until 1700 or 1600, and even after that for a long time, so that does not quite suffice as an adequate description of Burke. One has to say at least conservative aristocracy—at least—but even that is not distinguishing, because Cicero or Plato or Aristotle and many others were the same. The real thing in Burke, the characteristic thing, I believe, is—and to that extent I agree with the older opinion about Burke which emphasized the connection between Burke and the historical school. That is the novel thing, the emphasis on growth as opposed to making. That was something radically new.[xxxii]

LS: Now what was your precise question?

Student: [. . .]

LS: Yes, there is no doubt that a crude understanding of Burke would justify that, but certainly in the nineteenth century, people did not leave it at that. And these names I mentioned here—but not only Nietzsche and Marx, of course, but especially Hegel, and even John Stuart Mill in his

[xxxii] The transcriber notes: "Tape inaudible here. The following supplied from typist's class notes: Did Tocqueville, with Marx and/or Nietzsche, give an adequate solution of the natural right problem? The deficiency of this course is that I have not given an analysis of premodern natural right teaching, although I have supplied for that deficiency by advising you to read Cicero and St. Thomas Aquinas, and to read my analysis in my book *Natural Right and History*. Those of you who have done this reading and the required reading for the course in Burke and Paine have sufficient understanding of the problem for our purposes."

way—tried of course to think in theoretical terms about the fundamental problems. But you mentioned another point, nationalism.

Student: [. . .]

LS: Let me make this distinction now. Nationalism in the sense in which it is sometimes used in this country means just collective selfishness more or less glorified.[xxxiii] But in Europe nationalism had a more specific meaning—of course not unknown in this country, namely, think of Wilson's "Fourteen Points."[xxxiv] I think I would define nationalism in the precise sense as follows: the view that in a well-ordered society the boundaries, the political boundaries, coincide with the boundaries of the ethnic group. That was the meaning of European nationalism. I say "ethnic" leaving it open whether ethnic has to be defined more precisely in terms of language, or culture, or in terms of race. That was always possible—[those are] possible interpretations. Now nationalism thus understood: as a fact it is as old as the hills, but as a theory I believe it is not older than the eighteenth century; and [it is] clearly visible in Rousseau and perhaps even in Montesquieu and, very interestingly, in its origin [as] an outgrowth of modern natural science in its application to social matters. And only in the German movement, around 1800, was it divorced from the natural science aspect and linked up with the German notion of the *Volkmind*—mind as distinguished from the body. Now where does nationalism come in? Nationalism played, naturally, an enormous role in the nineteenth century up to the present day, although today I think its theoretical back is broken, however virulent it may still be in fact. [17]It doesn't exist in Burke in this sense that I'm describing now, but of course a historical school which combined Rousseau and Burke, we can say, developed the doctrine of the *Volkmind* and gave, therefore, nationalism a sort of theoretical basis. And even Hegel did that in his way.

If we speak of the three "isms" today, which is naturally a very narrow perspective but an inevitable and legitimately narrow perspective, it is very interesting. When we speak of these three "isms," where does nationalism come in? Is liberal democracy essentially nationalistic? The answer is no. Look at Switzerland: that would seem to settle the issue. Is communism essentially nationalistic? Obviously not. So in this context, nationalism comes in only under fascism, by which I don't mean to say—that would be a great injustice—that all nationalists are fascists. Far from it. But of these three great movements characteristic of the mid-twentieth century, only fascism is an heir to the nineteenth-century nationalism. In the nineteenth century, nationalism went together easily but not necessarily with liberal democracy, and the notion was this. What was the connection? I think I can best state it in old-fashioned eighteenth-century terms: nature. A free society is a society in which everyone can develop himself according to his individuality. That you know. Now his individuality, which means the individuality given to him by nature: in a nondemocratic society, or rather in an unfree society, natural individualities[xxxv] are crushed, uniform, modelled on a universal pattern. Now as natural as are the individual differences are the national differences. The natural differences are a product of nature. People living in such a climate, having these and these natural forms of food supply, and so on, developed this and this character. That I think was the original basis for a theoretical justification

[xxxiii] In the transcript: "glorified or so (?)"
[xxxiv] A speech delivered on January 8, 1918 by Woodrow Wilson, in which he defines the aims of United States involvement in World War I.
[xxxv] In the transcript: "individualities (?)"

of nationalism. And therefore freedom[18] means naturalness[xxxvi] in that stage [. . .] interference with what is really a product of nature, and that means also paying due regard to national individuality. That was the simple connection, I believe, between liberalism and nationalism. But nationalism could also take another turn, and this other element of nationalism, namely, the nonliberal element, completely isolated becomes then a mark of fascism. But fascism itself is not sufficiently understood as a decayed form of nationalism; it has another root which we can discover most clearly in Nietzsche. We can say fascism emerges through the nationalistic interpretation of Nietzsche—and Nietzsche was of course absolutely opposed to nationalism, as you know. Fascism was in theoretical terms an attempt to make the radical or extremist aristocracy workable by appealing to nationalism. I will explain this when I come to Nietzsche. I don't know whether I answered your question?

Student: [. . .]

LS: . . . articulates the nation. And from this point of view there is of course a connection. If the democratic theory as developed [. . .] by Rousseau means the highest standard is the general will, meaning the will of society. You cannot appeal from the will of society to something higher. But what is the object of the will of society? The society's own good. Period. Then you have nationalism in a crude sense. The collective selfishness of the group becomes the highest standard. That is of course a possibility there. In Rousseau [it is] still mitigated by some notions of international law and humanity, but that could be dropped consistently. There is a great difficulty about the status of international law in Rousseau's doctrine. So then next time I will make a few critical remarks on Tocqueville and then turn to Marx.

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[1] Deleted "is the."
[2] Deleted "the."
[3] Deleted "is."
[4] Deleted "except."
[5] Moved "of this kind."
[6] Deleted "denying."
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[8] Deleted "of them."
[9] Deleted "meant"
[10] Deleted "What is."
[11] Deleted "lose."
[12] Deleted "by."
[13] Deleted "to."
[14] Deleted "distinguishing."
[15] Deleted "every."
[16] Deleted "same tradition (?) of"
[17] Deleted "and it could be"
[18] Deleted "means."

[xxxvi] In the transcript: "naturalness (?)"

Session 12: no date
Rousseau, Burke, Hegel, and Marx

Leo Strauss: First, I should like to make some remarks that will conclude my discussion of Tocqueville of last time. Tocqueville confronts democracy with aristocracy in order to bring [out] the dangers to which democracy is exposed. This confrontation implies, of course, considerable criticism of democracy. The principle of democracy is equality, and there is a potential conflict between equality and freedom, and the freedom of the individual. Freedom is a higher good than equality because it is more directly connected with human excellence. What are the specific dangers of democracy? There is first the danger to political freedom, the growing power of the state contrary to the unfounded expectations of Tom Paine, among others. That means of course the growing power of the majority, that is to say, of the mass. The puny individual is in danger of being crushed or overawed. What is the problem? I read from Tocqueville, towards the end of the book:

"It would seem that, if despotism were to be established amongst democratic nations of our days, it might assume a different character; it would be more extensive and more mild; it would degrade men without tormenting them . . .

"When I consider the petty passions of our contemporaries, the mildness of their manners, the extent of their education, the purity of their religion, the gentleness of their morality, their regular and industrious habits, and the restraint which they almost all observe in their vices no less than in their virtues, I have no fear that they will meet with tyrants in their rulers, but rather with guardians.

"I think, then, that the species of oppression by which democratic nations are menaced is unlike anything that ever before existed in the world: our contemporaries will find no prototype of it in their memories. I seek in vain for an expression that will accurately convey the whole of the idea I have formed of it; the old words despotism and tyranny are inappropriate: the thing itself is new, and since I cannot name, I must attempt to define it.

"I seek to trace the novel features under which despotism may appear in the world. The first thing that strikes the observation is an innumerable multitude of men, all equal and alike, incessantly endeavoring to procure the petty and paltry pleasures with which they glut their lives. Each of them, living apart, is as a stranger to the fate of all the rest,— his children and his private friends constitute to him the whole of mankind; as for the rest of his fellow-citizens, he is close to them, but he sees them not; he touches them, but he feels them not; he exists only in himself and for himself alone; and if his kindred still remain to him, he may be said at any rate to have lost his country.

"Above this race of men stands an immense and tutelary power, which takes upon itself alone to secure their gratifications, and to watch over their fate. That power is absolute, minute, regular, provident, and mild. It would be like the authority of a parent, if, like that authority, its object was to prepare men for manhood; but it seeks, on the contrary, to keep them in perpetual

childhood . . .”[i]

LS: In other words, the paternalistic welfare state, in language of the present day. There is another observation which is connected with the one which I just read to you, and that concerns the problem of war, because the connection between a strong state and war is, I think, obvious. Tocqueville speaks of the extreme difficulties in democratic ages to draw nations into war because of the predominance of enlightened self-interest and the other things which we have discussed last time:

“but, on the other [hand], it is almost impossible that any two of them should go to war without embroiling the rest. The interests of all are interlaced, their opinions and their wants so much alike, that none can remain quiet when the others stir. Wars therefore become more rare, but when they break out, they spread over a larger field.”[ii]

Now whether wars are really more rare in the democratic age than before is another question, but that they spread out more is I think evident to everyone: the very term “world war” being coined in 1914 proves that. Tocqueville doesn’t link up the two things, the new despotism and world wars, but we, I think, don’t go considerably beyond what he intended if we see a link-up there. Now this is then the first grave danger: state power surpassing all previous power.[1] Of course, he was not thinking of totalitarianism; he regarded this as a danger for democracy itself.

The second grave danger I have mentioned before, but I must repeat it, is to intellectual freedom, and he was of course not thinking of any legal repressions of freedom of thought but of the fact that the mass becomes the intellectual authority. The third danger is the danger, we may say, to human greatness.

“The good things and the evils of life are more equally distributed in the world: great wealth tends to disappear, the number of small fortunes to increase; desires and gratifications are multiplied, but extraordinary prosperity and irremediable penury are alike unknown. The sentiment of ambition is universal, but the scope of ambition is seldom vast. Each individual stands apart in solitary weakness; but society at large is active, provident, and powerful; the performances of private persons are insignificant, those of the state immense.

“There is little energy of character, but customs[iii] are mild, and laws humane. If there be few instances of exalted heroism or of virtues of the highest, brightest, and purest temper, men’s habits are regular, violence is rare, and cruelty almost unknown. Human existence becomes longer, and property more secure: life is not adorned with brilliant trophies, but it is extremely easy and tranquil. [You must of course see that he is measuring by older standards, not by absolute standards—LS] Few pleasures are either very refined or very coarse; and highly polished manners are as uncommon as great brutality of tastes. Neither men of great learning, nor extremely ignorant communities, are to be met with; genius becomes more rare, information more diffused. The human mind is impelled by the small efforts of all mankind combined together, not by the strenuous activity of a few men. There is less perfection, but more

[i] *DA* 2. 4. 6, 662-663.
[ii] *DA*, 2. 3. 26, 631.
[iii] In original: “manners”

abundance, in all the productions of the arts. The ties of race, of rank, and of country are relaxed; the great bond of humanity is strengthened.

"If I endeavor to find out the most general and most prominent of all these different characteristics, I perceive that what is taking place in men's fortunes manifests itself under a thousand other forms. Almost all extremes are softened or blunted: all that was most prominent is superseded by some middle term, at once less lofty and less low, less brilliant and less obscure, than what before existed in the world."[iv]

Now what he had in mind is, I think, the phenomenon which we might call in relatively polite language philistinism, and in the brutal language of Nietzsche, the last man; namely, the man who has little pleasures by day, little pleasures by night, and thinks he has discovered happiness. I mention Nietzsche advisedly to show you the connection between this very moderate and humane criticism of the modern development of Tocqueville and the extreme revolt against it which is represented by Nietzsche. If we had time, I think one could show that this analysis is certainly not entirely wrong. One could say something about the state of the sciences in general and social sciences in particular in connection with this phenomenon which he described. One could also analyze such an outstanding theorist of democracy in our age as John Dewey and give an analysis of his moral doctrine, which I think could in all fairness be described as a very impressive statement of[2] [philistine] ethics. But I don't have the time for that.

I raise this one question. Why does Tocqueville decide in favor of democracy, seeing this grave problem? The first answer is that he doesn't decide. *He* doesn't decide; someone else has decided for him. I read to you just one passage from the introduction to the first part:

"[T]hose who have fought for it, and those who have declared themselves its opponents have all been driven along in the same direction[v], have all labored to one end; some unknowingly and some despite themselves,[vi] all have been blind instruments in the hands of God.

"The gradual development of the principle of equality is, therefore, a Providential fact. It has all the chief characteristics of such a fact: it is universal, it is lasting,[vii] it constantly eludes all human interference, and all events as well as all men contribute to its progress.

"Would it, then, be wise to imagine that a social movement, the causes of which lie so far back, can be checked by the efforts of one generation? Can it be believed that the democracy which has overthrown the feudal system, and vanquished kings, will retreat before tradesmen and capitalists? Will it stop now that it has grown so strong, and its adversaries so weak?

"Whither, then, are we tending? No one can say, for terms of comparison already fail us. There is greater equality of condition in Christian countries at the present day than there has been[viii] at any

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[iv] *DA* 2. 4. 8, 674.
[v] In original: "track"
[vi] In original: "some ignorantly and some unwillingly"
[vii] In original: "durable"
[viii] In original: "The conditions of men are more equal in the Christian countries at the present day than they have been"

previous time, or in any part of the world, so that the magnitude of what already has been done prevents us from foreseeing what is yet to be accomplished.
"The whole book that is here offered to the public has been written under the influence of a kind of religious awe[ix] produced in the author's mind by the view of that irresistible revolution which has advanced for centuries in spite of every obstacle, and which is still advancing in the midst of the ruins it has caused."[x]

In other words, providence has decided in favor of democracy. Now we have seen already the beginning of this argument in the end of Burke's *Thoughts on French Affairs*. Now let us look at this argument. I think it is obviously insufficient, because the fact that a great social movement is victorious does not prove that God willed it for men to accept it for the good. It could very well be divine punishment inflicted on men for their sins. So the presupposition of this argument is really not the theological understanding of providence but what is loosely called the secularized version of providence, meaning an understanding according to which the ways of God are not inscrutable, [3][so that we really could know whether this is a blessing or not, because the ways of God are scrutable]. In the traditional understanding of providence, man took his bearing by God's love addressed to man, natural or revealed, and not by the ways of providence, which are never fully clear. I don't want to dwell on that. At any rate, that is certainly not a sufficient argument. It goes without saying that the same argument which favors democracy in Tocqueville's argument would favor any successful antidemocratic movement in a later age, very obviously.

The second reason [that Tocqueville decides in favor of democracy] is of a more serious nature, and that is that democratic egalitarianism is rooted in Christianity. This is a thought to which he frequently recurs. In other words,[4] modern democracy fulfills the will of the New Testament on political things. The third argument, which is somehow connected with the second, is one I must read to you in Tocqueville's own language, where he retracts or seems to retract his whole previous criticism toward the end of the book.

"When I survey this countless multitude of beings, shaped in each other's likeness [in other words, no true individualism any more—LS] amidst whom nothing rises and nothing falls, the sight of such universal uniformity saddens and chills me, and I am tempted to regret that state of society which has ceased to be. When the world was full of men of great importance and extreme insignificance, of great wealth and extreme poverty, of great learning and extreme ignorance, I turned aside from the latter to fix my observation on the former alone, who gratified my sympathies. But I admit that this gratification arose from my own weakness: it is because I am unable to see at once all that is around me that I am allowed thus to select and separate the objects of my predilection from among so many others. Such is not the case with that Almighty and Eternal Being, whose gaze necessarily includes the whole of created things, and who surveys distinctly, though all at once, mankind and man.

"We may naturally believe that it is not the singular prosperity of the few, but the greater well-being of all, which is most pleasing in the sight of the Creator and Preserver of men. What appears to me to be man's decline is, to His eye, advancement; what afflicts me is acceptable to

[ix] In original: "terror"
[x] *DA* 1, Author's introduction, 6.

Him. A state of equality is perhaps less elevated, but it is more just: and its justice constitutes its greatness and its beauty."[xi]

In other words, that constitutes the philosophic argument which seems to decide the issue in the eyes of Tocqueville: democracy is more just than aristocracy. But this is really a very peculiar notion of justice, namely, the notion of justice which completely disregards the other aspect, the aspect of the elevation or perfection which he also mentions in the same context. We are therefore not surprised to observe that Tocqueville continues as follows:

"No man upon the earth, can as yet affirm, absolutely and generally, that the new state of the world is better than its former one; but it is already easy to perceive that this state is different. Some vices and some virtues were so inherent in the constitution of an aristocratic nation and are so opposite to the character of a modern people that they can never be infused into it; some good tendencies and some bad propensities which were unknown to the former are natural to the latter; some ideas suggest themselves spontaneously to the imagination of the one, which are utterly repugnant to the mind of the other. They are like two distinct orders of human beings, each of which has its own merits and defects, its own advantages and its own evils."[xii]

[There are] similar passages elsewhere. In other words, the last word, almost literally the last word in the book of Tocqueville is that the question cannot be decided. There are two social systems, each with its peculiar merits and peculiar defects, and we have to accept the one because it has been victorious, or, to use the religious language of Tocqueville, because providence has declared in favor of it. If we consider[5] an attitude such as that of Tocqueville, we understand better the human roots of the present attitude of the social sciences toward value judgments. Here there is no notion of scientific method and so on which influences Tocqueville's hesitation, but there is [an] inability or unwillingness to make a decision between two social systems which both impress him in different ways. He doesn't see any criterion for deciding the ultimate superiority. You have here an inkling of what Max Weber later on meant by his insoluble value conflict.

Here you have a social order, democracy, [which is] superior to aristocracy from the point of view of justice, but from the point of view of human elevation aristocracy is superior to democracy. And what can you do? You are confronted with this insoluble problem. Needless to say, in Tocqueville's scheme and his understanding there are certain things which are altogether bad and which could not be considered as respectable for one moment.[6] Simple tyranny or simple despotism would [be] out of any consideration, so it is still a very balanced and moderate "relativism," but the roots of the relativism are here. I think we can see the reason if we analyze Tocqueville's thought more closely. I mentioned this point before. For Tocqueville the democratic ideas, as we usually call them, the principles by which democratic societies live, are a consequence of the establishment of a democratic society, so it is not that these ideas guided men in striving for a democratic order. Tocqueville is a sociologist. The fundamental fact which moves man and society are not so much opinions or ideas but social conditions, and this is of course closely connected with the general[7] broader phenomenon we have discussed previously, namely, this fundamental change in modern thought in which the ruling or guiding position of

[xi] *DA* 2. 4. 8, 674-675.
[xii] *DA* 2. 4. 8, 675.

the mind or reason was weakened in favor of other elements of human nature, in favor of sentiment, in favor of the fundamental wants or other elements. Tocqueville's formulation and his thought about it is only a modification. I will come back to this perhaps later. Now let me conclude these remarks.

One point is crucial for Tocqueville's argument. Whatever the fundamental difficulties may be, democracy can be and remain compatible with freedom and the dignity of man only if it is religious. That goes through the whole book. The difficulty is of course that the age of democracy is an age of skepticism and incredulity. Tocqueville wrote many years before Darwin and the other great upsurge of natural science affecting modern thought. Tocqueville gives all kinds of advice, especially to religious leaders of the democratic age: they must put greater emphasis on morality than on ritual and dogma and so on; they must exercise great prudence. This argument, while it is very strongly stated and doubtless the nerve of the argument, it has a certain inherent weakness, because while Tocqueville was doubtless personally a religious man, the argument is here made as a political argument, as follows: Spiritualistic religion is needed for democracy.[xiii] Now this kind of argument is of course dangerous to religion, because this argument proves merely the need of spiritualistic myth and not the need of a spiritualistic religion. I also mention another point, but I can only allude to that: from the quite obvious limit of Tocqueville's argument, his complete unawareness, one could say, of what came to be called the social problem. Of course there are certain remarks in which he indicates that modern democracy, being an industrial democracy, is productive of a new kind of inequality; but that this might lead to grave problems, grave problems threatening democracy, that awareness does not exist, to my knowledge.

I would only make this remark in conclusion to link up the discussion of Tocqueville with the theme of this course, namely, the problem of natural right. What is usually called modern rationalism, [the] rationalism of the seventeenth century and its natural right doctrine, was already based on a subordination of reason and of the intellect to something nonrational, nonintellectual, subintellectual: the fundamental needs of man, and sentiment and so on. The movements of the nineteenth century continue and radicalize this tendency, and connected with the inner crisis of modern natural right[8] was the decisive reason why natural right and the idea of natural right lost its hold on the mind of modern western man. We will find other aspects of the same development in the remarks of Marx and Nietzsche.

Student: On Tocqueville's third argument for democracy, concerning justice, does he make the argument on the basis that democratic society satisfies the needs that are most powerful in most men most of the time?

LS: No, it is simply a general notion. One could say, in Aristotelian language, he dogmatically accepts the democratic notion of justice, justice simply identical with equality, so that the kind of reasonable inequality corresponding to merit is not considered. The fundamental reason is the serious will of providence. But then of course, since he can't help thinking about it, he gives an analysis, and the analysis leads to criticism, inevitably. And then there is a conflict between the belief in the divine dispensation and the criticism that is solved, if you can call it a solution. I am not aware of a more adequate solution. In the nineteenth century, this view was very strong, and

[xiii] In the transcript, inserted above the typed line is: "(cf. pp. 513; 430-1 among others)."

it is of course still lingering on in present-day social sciences, just as if you scratch the skin of present-day social science you can see the basis in utilitarianism. You can also find in another way this peculiar limitation of the horizon exemplified by Tocqueville: that is *settled,* the question is settled by the successful establishment of this order. Now this is an excellent argument from any practical point of view, but theoretically it is impossible to leave it at that. In a way, Tocqueville knows that. Now one could say that it is perhaps the greatest political work of the nineteenth century. It is the work of a fairly young man—he was about twenty-seven when he wrote it. But it is very strange to see in his later works on the *Ancien Régime and the Revolution*[xiv] [that] the fundamental argument is in no way taken up again. He rests satisfied with that: democracy is about to become victorious.

We are confronted with this alternative: to make an extremist movement like the French *Terreur* of 1848, or some respectable democracy of the Anglo-American type. And that is the problem. That this is the *practical* problem would be [a] defensible position. I don't know whether it is even the correct position, because this notion of the mild paternalistic end, which Nietzsche too had, is based on a very grave delusion that social influences of any kind can really extirpate the fundamental beastlinesses of which man is unfortunately capable. The clear optimism even here for which we may be said to have paid a very heavy price in the twentieth century.

Student: Is the idea of progress necessarily involved in his belief?

LS: No, because that would be true only if equality were the one thing next;[xv] but since there is this questioning of democracy, it means that God has changed one social system into another, neither of which is perfect and neither of which is despicable, and we simply [take] that [one] allotted to us. One can perhaps put it this way, and it is not perhaps the worst thing that one can say about this kind of political thought: it is an approach which is perfectly sound for most practical purposes, but is never sufficient from the point of view of theory. I make this reservation, for *most* practical purposes, not for all, because there are always little difficulties there which are overlooked and which bear in themselves the germ of very grave practical dangers. There are several other things one could say, for instance, that Tocqueville simply identifies aristocracy with the *ancien régime* with all of its residues of feudalism, which are not of course of the essence of aristocracy.

I shall turn now to a discussion of Marxism, which will require somewhat more time. If I may remind you again of my simplistic scheme, Marx is obviously much closer to Paine than to Burke, and there is a remark in *Capital* about Burke which surpasses in virulence anything that Paine said about him.[xvi] But that is less than half of the story; there is a very important link between Marx and Burke. All these three men, i.e., Nietzsche, Tocqueville, Marx, whom I

[xiv] *L'ancien régime et la revolution* (1856). Translated into English as "The Old Regime and the Revolution."

[xv] In the transcript: "next (?)"

[xvi] Marx refers to the "celebrated sophist and sycophant, Edmund Burke," in *Capital,* volume 1, chapter 13.

discuss on this level combine in a curious way the two elements. [LS writes on the blackboard][xvii]

Burke Paine

Marx Tocqueville Nietzsche

How does Burke come in [with] Marx? Very simply. One of the key words in Marx is "ideology." It is of course a term of blame or of degradation. Marx took it over; he gave it of course a somewhat special meaning, but the notion that ideology is something secondary, derivative, questionable, to be distrusted, that antedates Marx. The man who coined it was Napoleon. There was also a certain philosophic school in the France of Napoleon who called themselves the ideologists and called philosophy ideology. That was a kind of philosophy along Lockean lines, but it is of no interest to us. Napoleon, speaking about these professors, called this kind of approach to politics the approach of the ideology, and ideology took on this meaning. [xviii] His rationalistic and even atheistic opponents he called ideologists. What Napoleon meant by ideology and ideologists corresponds strictly to Burke's concept of speculators and thoroughbred metaphysicians. It is only this opposition of practice, political practice, to theory which is crucial to Burke [and] is a critical element of Marx as well. Burke may be said to have said that the sound social order must come into being not after first having been apprehended by wise founders or legislators but it comes into being by practice not guided by theory. That is, while not a complete statement of Marx's doctrine, a very important part of Marx's doctrine.

To understand Marx, at least as far as it is important here, we have to go back far behind the duel between Paine and Burke and in the first place to Rousseau. The state of nature has great inconveniences. They may be extremely great, as Hobbes says, or they may be very great, as Locke says, but at any rate there are great inconveniences. The state of nature, we may say, is also a state of self-contradiction. Man must leave it if he wants to think and act consistently. Out of this emerges civil society: the mighty Leviathan, as even Locke says. But, we add, the mighty Leviathan, again quoting Hobbes, whose blood is money.[xix] If we don't make that addition, we misunderstand Hobbes and we don't understand Locke: the mighty Leviathan whose blood is money. Once we have made this statement, we are then immediately at the beginning of Rousseau.[xx] He starts from this: that Hobbes's and Locke's civil society is a state of misery and viciousness. I have only to quote the authentic statement, the mighty Leviathan whose blood is money, and then you will see immediately what Rousseau has in mind. He opposes virtue to finance or trade, or another expression of the same thing, the citizen to the bourgeois—because

[xvii] Strauss's diagram shows Burke and Paine on the top line, and then spaced evenly on the line below them Marx, Tocqueville, and Nietzsche.

[xviii] See, e.g., Louis de Villefoss and Janine Bouissounouse, *The Scourge of the Eagle: Napoleon and the Liberal Opposition*, trans. Michael Ross (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1972), 132. Within several years the term had crossed the Atlantic; see the entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, vol.1, 1368: 1813. J. Adams, wrks (1856) X. 52. Napoleon has lately invented a word, which perfectly expressed my opinion. He calls the project ideology.

[xix] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter 24.

[xx] See *Natural Right and History*, 282.

Rousseau coined that distinction which Marx took over. The citizen is a member of a free society, of a fundamentally democratic society; the bourgeois is a subject of the absolute monarchy, a man who has a private sphere, the sphere of private property. He will try modestly, if he is an honest man, to enrich himself, but he has no public spirit. He is not permitted to have public spirit. Furthermore, in the *ancien régime* he is of course not a soldier; he does not defend his country, whereas the citizen is a citizen-soldier. So Hegel, taking over this distinction between citizen and soldier, went then so far as to say that the essence of the bourgeois is fear of violent death, which is of course a restatement of Hobbes's view, only that Hegel limited to the bourgeois what Hobbes said of citizens and of man.

The error of Hobbes and Locke is due, according to Rousseau, to a false conception of the state of nature. If men in the state of nature are presocial, as everyone admitted—at least as Hobbes and Locke admitted—then they must be prerational. They must be, in other words, stupid animals: Rousseau's own expression. Hence, Rousseau concludes, they live in a state of animal bliss. The state of nature is not self-contradictory, whereas modern society is the mighty Leviathan whose blood is money. What shall we do? Return to the state of nature, to the state of animal bliss? Impossible. After man has become a man, after man has developed his faculties, he can't make himself a brute. But why does Rousseau describe the state of nature in such glorious terms, though he knows that man cannot return to it? Answer: There must be a good beginning if there are to be no natural obstacles to a final perfection. If man has by nature, in the state of nature, some vicious element in him, as Hobbes certainly had thought, there will always be limits to human perfection. However this may be, return to the state of nature is impossible, yet in a way the state of nature remains the model, according to Rousseau. I again anticipate Marx, just as the primitive communism is of course impossible to return to, but it is a model communism.

Why did men leave the state of nature? Answer: They were forced to leave it. To begin with, there was plenty because there were so few people and many bananas. Then, because there was so much around, people increased like rabbits, [thereby] producing[9] scarcity. They had to begin to work, and had even to begin to invent, and so they were forced by scarcity to think. In a word, through the process of satisfying wants, human reason developed. Reason developed in the service of the satisfaction of wants. Man *becomes* a rational animal. There is one very important stage in the process of satisfying wants, and that is the need for possession. Obviously, [without possessions] you can't have agriculture: no one would want to cultivate the uncultivated land if he doesn't have a reasonable prospect to have the benefits of his work in the following year.

Now that means [that the next question is]: How can it be defended? There is a natural right of the first occupier. First come, first served: there is plenty of land around; I take this piece and begin to cultivate it. No one has a higher claim to that land than I have. Yet gradually there developed scarcity of land and of food, and at this stage a conflict arises between possession based on the right of the first occupier and self-preservation of those who came too late, perhaps through no fault of their own. For example, the fellow could have been ill at that time when people took over the land, and so on and so on—you can easily imagine. That is the true state of war according to Rousseau's doctrine: it is not at the beginning, but it is developed in the moment land was more or less divided up. You have the owners of land on the one hand, and on the other you have propertyless poor devils. What happens? A conspiracy of the rich. They set up

law and government to protect their usurpation, to keep the propertyless poor devils out from their land. This is a fundamental act of injustice, and yet we can't go back behind it.

Now once people set up government, however, this government was originally very limited and absolutely dependent on the popular will, but in the course of time the government became stronger and stronger; and thus despotism developed, the scourge of human nature. This process in which very simple savages gradually became subjects of despotic kings was due to no human sin or fault, as the theological tradition said, but it was inevitable and necessary because of man's lack of experience and philosophy, Rousseau says. Yet these same experiences, including the bitter experience with despotic government, made men wiser. And at the end of this process the true public right is discovered, and the discoverer is of course Rousseau. So man, who as a human being is a product of mere natural necessity, becomes eventually the seeing master of his fate. That moment is Rousseau's moment. Practice not guided by theory, all these movements of satisfaction of wants and so forth, and these experiments with government all trial and error with no real notion of what the right form of government is—this practice not guided by theory eventually leads up to the true theory.

Now what is the true theory? In a word, the social contract which requires the complete alienation—also a Marxian word—of everyone to society or, as Rousseau also puts it, the denaturalization of man. Man must be transformed from a natural being into a citizen. The collectivization of man, which however does not mean here the abolition of private property, but that man is *completely* a citizen and that freedom and liberty and right which he has, including private property, is a gift of society and is not based on any natural right. Society is thus constructed where everyone has a vote, and so on. That is the only solution. But you see this solution is based, Rousseau emphasizes even in the *Social Contract*, on that original usurpation or conspiracy of the rich. This can never be remedied. As Rousseau put it, laws are always more favorable to the rich than to the poor, even in a democratic society. But the best solution you have is a democratic society, but it cannot be a perfect solution. As Rousseau put it at the very beginning of the *Social Contract*: society itself is justified but is still a form of bondage. How does it begin? "Every man is born free; everywhere we find him in chains. How did this transformation take place, how did this change happen? I do not know. But what can make it legitimate? I believe I can answer this question."[xxi] That is the first paragraph. And what does he say?[10] The subject of the *Social Contract* is to show how the change from natural freedom to bondage is legitimate. The problem is really the distinction between legitimate bondage—civil society, and illegitimate bondage—tyranny. Even the best state favors the haves against the have-nots; even the best state is based on the initial usurpation of the rich. Civil society is therefore *essentially* self-contradictory, meaning even the best civil society.

Now man longs for a non-self-contradictory solution. Rousseau saw fundamentally two ways out. One is love, love of members of the family, especially love of husband and wife. The other is—I must abbreviate a long story—art, the artist. The artist living at the fringes of society solves for himself the human problem. But it is obviously not an elegant solution of that great difficulty that we are confronted with, this situation: some individuals, happy couples or creative artists, confronted with [an] all-inclusive, half-Spartan society which [gives] all its members justice but deprives them all of natural happiness. Now how can we get out of this?

[xxi] Strauss cites from memory and states the gist of the paragraph.

The solution which was found to Rousseau's difficulty is expressed perhaps most simply by Hegel, and Hegel as you know is the spiritual father, perhaps out of wedlock, of Marx. Now Hegel's whole tendency was to reconcile the conflict. He had a term[11] [for] that human condition in [which] the conflicts are unreconciled: he calls it the unhappy consciousness. And he saw that unhappy consciousness especially in his own age, and especially in the teaching of Rousseau and the pupils of Rousseau, the so-called Romantics. What is the essence of Hegel's reconciliation? Answer: the general will, the will of society, is the *true* will of the individual, whereas for Rousseau they were true only on the basis of a fictitious supposition but not truly. The general will is the true will of the individual, and the reason for this is ultimately this: Rousseau understood by the will of the individual, or the true will of the individual, a desire for self-preservation of the individual or the desire for the satisfaction of the wants of the individual.

Hegel questioned that, because if that were true, he admits there would never be a solution to the difficulty. The specifically human desire according to Hegel is the desire to be recognized by other human beings. In other words, that is the Hobbean pride modified: primarily to be recognized by others as superior, but it is more general than that, the desire to be recognized by the others. This desire according to Hegel leads primarily to a life and death struggle, just—it really is Hobbes. Man is so little concerned with self-preservation that he risks his life for the sake of recognition; in the low language of our age, for the sake of his prestige. He prefers death to slavery. More precisely, some do, others don't. And therefore, out of this desire for recognition the relation between master and slave emerges. Master is he who prefers death to slavery, and slave is he who prefers slavery to death. This is a fundamental distinction which is also the root of Nietzsche's distinction between master morality and slave morality. The masters fight, and apart from fighting, they enjoy life. Obviously the slaves work for them, and they [12][consume what the slaves produce]. The slaves on the other hand do not fight, nor do they enjoy life, but work. There does seem to be at first inspection a superiority of the master: obviously, to fight and to enjoy [life] seems to be better than not to fight and to be just an instrument of other human beings. But as Hegel contends, a close analysis shows that the master's way is a dead-end street. He consumes and thus destroys the things which the slaves produce. But the slave works; and what does working mean from Hegel's point of view? Not just getting some water from a well, but it means transforming things. We might say he is creative. He transforms the given into the creation of man, so the slave's working is really a higher form of mastery than the master's way of life.

Now this master-slave society, which is for Hegel the prototype of human society in the first stage, not historically speaking, is nevertheless modeled on the Greek city. This master-slave society necessarily undergoes transformations culminating in the establishment of a universal city, and that is historically speaking Rome, especially Rome under the Empire. Here we see private property secure, a universal equality in slavery—no longer domestic slavery but political slavery; and in this world of the Roman Empire, Christianity emerges or comes [. . .] Here we have in Christianity—early Christianity is for [13][Hegel] the supplement to Roman society. In the Roman society we find universal equality in slavery. In Christianity we find universal equality through subjection to God, and therefore an inner freedom from the emperor. But this original Christianity was necessarily and inevitably otherworldly. This inner freedom was found in another life. This dualism between the otherworldly and the this-worldly determined the whole

history of the West until the Reformation. Since the Reformation the attempt[14] [has been] made to secularize Christianity, which means in Hegel's understanding to permeate the political and social life of man fully by the Christian spirit and not to seek anymore the solution of the fundamental contradiction in a life after death.

The abolition of the dualism of spiritual and temporal, the permeation of both, this is the fruit of the Reformation, which culminates in the modern state via the French Revolution. What is the end of this? Here now every human being is recognized as a human being by everyone else: in other words, the rights of man. Everyone is now both master and slave, namely, he works and he fights for his country. So not the French Revolution itself but the modern state emerging on the basis of the French Revolution[15] is the solution of the fundamental contradiction, a contradiction which found its most glaring expression in Rousseau's teaching, but which according to Hegel existed from the very beginning in various forms. This modern state as Hegel sees it is of course not a democracy. In Hegel it has a hierarchic order and is a constitutional monarchy in the Prussian sense of the term, meaning very little power for the estates, to say nothing of parliament, and very much power for the crown. But there is one point which we have to add in fairness to Hegel. Who is really ruling in Hegel's perfect order? Hegel's word is "intelligence," and this intelligence is of course not identical with the sometimes very unintelligent mind of the actual monarch. There must be a [hereditary] monarchy for reason.[xxii] But he is guided, this monarch is guided by intelligence. What is that intelligence? In the language of the present times: bureaucracy, a very highly educated and enlightened civil servant. And that is something which in later history has been of great importance, as you all know.

Now this sound and final order, the postrevolutionary state in which intelligence rules, is produced by man, but not consciously. It is produced not by individuals but by society, by ethnic groups. I don't know [how] to translate the German word *Volk*, which if I say "nation" does not quite correspond to the German word *Volk*. I would say "ethnic groups" and leave it open whether the ethnic groups are meant to be—of course, in Hegel it wouldn't be racial, naturally; it would be chiefly language and culture [that defined the groups]. Every nation unconsciously produces a world of its own—"world" is Hegel's word—a system of ideas and beliefs in which it expresses itself or objectivates itself. This ethnic group takes this objectivation as something to which it is subject, on which it is dependent. What does this mean, in simple language? Think of the Greek gods: Do Zeus and Ares exist by themselves, as human beings exist? Of course not. They were objectivations of the Greek folk mind. Such an objectivation of the national spirit takes place in every stage. What happens is that the collective subject alienates itself to its world; in other words, it does not recognize this world, say, the Pantheon, as its own creation but it believes itself subject to it. It does not recognize its world as its own free creation. The human mind produces such historical worlds, such social worlds in succession, in an ordered succession. Philosophy follows these primary productions: every philosopher is the son of his time and culture. Philosophy is the interpretation of a historical world, say, Greece, which is not known to be a historical world to them. In the last stage, philosophy has reached its full [16][consciousness]. The thinking, the creating subject has reappropriated its world; in other words, it has recognized that this is not independent of it but [is] its own work. Those of you who know ever so little of Marx will already recognize in this mythogogic statement the crucial Marxist contention that

[xxii] In the transcript: "reason (?)"

man alienates himself to his creation, and the final stage is that man takes back this *X* to which he has alienated himself and by this very fact becomes free and fulfills himself.

This process of alienation and eventual taking-back or reappropriating of the object is dialectical. I don't go now into the history of this term, which originally meant simply the art of dispute and came to mean so many other things. What does Hegel mean by that? The process is not a simply cumulative process as it is in progressivism, not a merely additive process. There is a radical change—not continuity, in the language of Burke. Whereas Burke had said that continuity is the method of nature, Hegel would say, if he would use that language: On the contrary, radical change is the method of nature. Each stage calls forth its denial, its destroyer; and out of this denial or destroyer emerges a synthesis which preserves both original stages. Very simple: thesis, A is B; antithesis, A is non-B; and then out of that emerges a third stage, which is a synthesis in which both are preserved. One of the examples with which Hegel opens his *Logic* is this: the thesis is being. And now Hegel says: If we look at what we mean by being a little bit more closely, we see it is nothing. So being transforms itself into nothing. Out of that there emerges the synthesis of being and nothing, and that is obviously becoming, because becoming consists of being and nothing. The synthesis acts as a new thesis. That is, if you look at it in a merely formalistic way there would be a new antithesis and a new synthesis, and so on. This ends necessarily in a final stage, in a final synthesis in which[17] a contradiction is [no longer] possible, in which all contradictions are resolved. And that is the Hegelian system corresponding to the postrevolutionary state of Europe as the final stage of the human mind or the history of mankind. The later stages of this process as a historical process can in no way be anticipated at an earlier stage. In other words, men do not consciously work toward *the* goal, the postrevolutionary stage. They do not apprehend that stage beforehand, but while pursuing their conscious goals, which may be of a very [low] kind, they unconsciously produce *the* goal, [the final goal] which can be apprehended only after it has been achieved.

What did Marx learn from Hegel? In the first place (I am trying to state the issues in the Marxist's own terms), the activity or spontaneity of man. What does that mean? This historical process, this progressive process, was in Rousseau's presentation forced upon man by circumstances. Man adapted himself to nature, to his environment, or whatever you might call it. That is not so in Hegel and Marx. The initiative is not with the circumstances, not with the environment, but with man. Man produces himself. In the second place, the creative action of man proceeds in stages. There is an orderly series of stages. The transition from one stage to another is not gradual but has the character of a leap from one to the other. That is the meaning of the scheme of thesis–antithesis–synthesis: the denial of continuation. Each stage destroys itself by producing its own destroyer. In the Marxist scheme—you know it very well: the stage of capitalist society destroys itself by producing [the] proletariat, that part which will destroy the capitalist system. The third point: the creative agents are not asocial individuals, as they still were in the typical eighteenth-century scheme, but groups. Groups objectivate themselves in their creation, alienate themselves to their creation. The fourth and last point: this process of successive creation culminates necessarily in a final stage in which all contradictions are resolved, in which man reaches full consciousness of his freedom and full freedom.

Resolution of all contradictions and freedom are the same thing, for the fundamental contradiction of all human life is that man is enslaved to his own creation, self-alienation, [and]

that is antithetical.[xxiii] Rousseau said the same thing, but it means here now something more radical, because it is self-alienation of man through society and only through society. Marx was of course aware of his dependence on Hegel and what one could call his dependence on Burke as well. I read to you just two passages from his *Treatise on Political Economy*: "What distinguishes Hegel's way of thinking from that of all other philosophers was the enormous *sense of history*."[xxiv] That was the novel thing, a philosopher equipped with [a] peculiar sense, which is then naturally called the historical sense, and that altered the character of human thought radically. What does that mean? Hegel was the first to try to show that history is a development, an interconnection; so in other words, the process of human deeds, deeds of social men, political and other society, is not just a sequence of various stupidities and nonstupidities but is a *meaningful* process, an intelligible process that *we* can understand. That it was a meaningful process was of course taught by all religious people, naturally, but with the understanding that the ways of God are not the ways of man. They are inscrutable to man. But now it is said[18] that it is possible for man to understand. That is one crucial point which Marx takes over from Hegel.

Another point in the eighteenth-century political economy: people used frequently the notion of Robinson Crusoe—you remember Defoe's story—as a model for understanding[19] the fundamental economic relations: isolated individuals satisfying their wants and *entering* into relations. In other words, they are not primarily social beings; they *enter* social relations in order to satisfy wants. Marx, in speaking about an English economist, Steuart, says: "Steuart has avoided this simplification." Why? "Being an aristocrat, he stands more on the bottom of history."[xxv] Very interesting. In other words, Marx has something decisively in common with the aristocratic position, aristocratic in the ordinary political sense, namely, the preservers of the established order, of the old *ancien régime*.[20] Being nonrevolutionary, being concerned with the preservation of the established order, they took what had grown, what had come into being in the course of time [more] than people who were simply opposed to that. That is another indication, and one could of course also quote from Lenin.[xxvi] One can perhaps say that the crucial point which Marx took over from Hegel was the radical criticism of "individualism." We cannot start from the isolated individual of the state of nature who enters into relations with others, but you have to start with men always as fundamentally social beings. Just to show the crucial practical consequences, in his *Theses on Feuerbach* Marx says capital is not a personal, but a social power.[xxvii] In the Lockean scheme, capital is of course a personal power. The philosopher who destroyed, according to Marx, the basis of such a doctrine which takes the individual as the starting point of human orientation was Hegel.

[xxiii] In the transcript: "antithetical (?)"

[xxiv] *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), ed. Maurice Dobb (International Publishers, 1979).

[xxv] Marx refers to Sir James Steuart, author of *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy*, 2 vols. (London, 1767). The quotation is from Marx's introduction to the *Grundrisse* (1857-58). Presumably Strauss's translation. The transcriber notes: "(cf. *Criticism of Political Economy*, German ed. Berlin 1951, p. 236)."

[xxvi] These sentences are as they appear in the transcript.

[xxvii] "Capital is, therefore, not a personal, it is a social power." *The Communist Manifesto*, part 2, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 485.

Student: [A question was asked about Robinson Crusoe][xxviii]

LS: [. . .] this notion that you can understand human civilization, or whatever you might call it, by starting[21] [with] an isolated individual who is thrown on a desert island and then builds up by his own resources and his unassisted reason[22] [the] fundamental elements of human civilization, that was the assumption of some of the economists. Robinson brought with him from England an enormous heritage; that is the point which is the simple objection. It is the same issue as that between Burke and Paine, of course, where Paine draws conclusions he made here in Pennsylvania about what the simple natural individual can do. And the question is inevitable, whether they are not heirs to a certain Anglo-Saxon tradition, and you cannot draw directly a conclusion from that as to what constitutes man. That is the same argument. Marx took Robinson and the "Robinsonades," as he calls the economic doctrine there, as fundamentally false, Hegel here playing an important part. More immediately important to us is Marx's criticism of Hegel, but first I should like to know if there is anything that you would like to have clarified concerning [the] wave from Rousseau via Hegel to Marx.

Student: [A question was asked about the Reformation, in answer to which Strauss reviewed the previous discussion, adding these points.][xxix]

LS: The stage in which the solution is found only in the other life, early Christianity, is radically [different from] what Hegel called the unhappy consciousness. The Greek society too was suffering from fundamental contradictions, but their consciousness was not unhappy because they had at least a delusion of finding a solution in this life. What happened in the Reformation was that these spheres, this life and the other life, were brought together. Hegel thinks of very simple things, for example, the changed status of marriage: the moment celibacy is abolished, marriage becomes holy. There is no higher state in the Christian life. A similar consideration applies to the state, and the difference between power spiritual and power temporal is either abolished or loses its practical meaning in the Protestant state. Christianity permeates completely, that is Hegel's contention, the life of this earth. The final form of that is the modern state, in which the perfect reconciliation of the Christian principle of equality and political institutions has taken place, in which every man *as man* can be a full citizen—not necessarily [having] equal political rights; that is another matter. So he is recognized by every human being by being or being capable of becoming a citizen. What Hegel says about these things I would say is really the least difficult to understand, because it is a very common notion: that the Reformation has taken seriously in the everyday life of men the principles of Christianity and has brought about a more truly Christian life than the Middle Ages. The specific contention of Hegel is only this: that this Christianization of life culminates in the recognition of the rights of man and the fundamental social principles, and this recognition of the rights of man finds its expression after that extreme antithesis of the French Revolution in the synthesis of the postrevolutionary state. This is a fairly simple illustration of what he meant: take the Christianity of Luther and Calvin. The antithesis to that would be the atheism of French materialism. In every point out of that, the synthesis of the postrevolutionary state emerges. There was something that

[xxviii] As noted by the transcriber, who adds: "to which the answer was in part, that" and continues with Strauss's response.
[xxix] As noted by the transcriber.

was really inadequate in the Reformation which could be fought only by opposing it radically so that the final solution could come out.

Did Hegel think that fifty years after him his doctrine would become obsolete? The utmost one could say is this: that in some letters of Hegel there are some speculations about the United States and Russia where he plays with some possibilities going beyond European history. One could perhaps say that Hegel did not face it completely, but fundamentally it is really meant to be the final doctrine, and prior to investigation we can't dismiss this contention, much as we may loathe the Prussian state of 1817 or whenever Hegel wrote. We have to look at it more closely before we can reject it. We don't know it from our own daily experience. I think this can be shown: the Prussian state of 1817 was a kind of concession which Hegel made. What he originally wanted was Napoleon uniting France as well as Prussia. I think the *Phenomenology of Mind* is written with a possibility in mind: the German philosophic idea terminating in the French empire, that would be the end—the citizen-soldier in a free society in which intelligence rules. That is, what the revolutionaries of the eighteenth century believed they found in some Tom Painean Pennsylvania really is found in the older European states after they have gone through [the] revolutionary experience. The revolution as such must be crushed by all means. I think I have said the same thing by implication.

If you grant me this for a moment, that the mighty Leviathan is the most powerful and successful form of Machiavelli, then Rousseau's opposition to that was an attempt to restore Socrates: virtue against finance. Adam Smith has been incorporated one hundred percent in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, but subordinated to that moral state originally conceived in Platonic-Aristotelian terms. The early writings of Hegel are based absolutely on Plato, but he believed he had learned that the *polis* is no longer workable; we have to have therefore a radical modification of the *polis* into which Adam Smith and all he stands for is integrated, and that is the postrevolutionary state of Hegel's doctrine. Something like virtue is in control, but with much greater freedom for the commercial and industrial life than is compatible with the classical doctrine.

Student: [. . .]

LS: To say that the most viable solution to Machiavelli's objection would be the Leviathan whose blood is money is not yet to answer Machiavelli's contradiction, or what I understood to be Machiavelli's doctrine as it plays a role as a contradiction of the Socratic teaching. A solution would be the answer to the objection. The thesis is Socratic virtue; the antithesis is [a] Machiavellian foundation on lesser but more powerful things. The synthesis preserves both but is closer to the thesis than to the antithesis. The way toward that best order is absolutely Machiavellian, people fighting for their interest alone.

The transition from *Volk* to class is a part of Marx's criticism of Hegel, but the crucial step was taken by Hegel in opposing the individualism of the modern natural right doctrine, which of course went into German philosophy: Fichte and Kant. It is true but it is not sufficient to say that Hegel and therefore Marx restored against the individualism of the seventeenth and eighteenth century the old Aristotelian notion that man is a social animal. It is not identically the same, but for many practical purposes it is. The question is: How do we have to conceive of that

association which is natural to man? Anthropology. There Hegel says it is the ethnic group, and Marx says it is the class, but with this understanding: that neither of them can be called natural. How does it come [to be] that the ethnic group as ethnic group, which of course always existed and were always to exist, becomes now so central in political philosophy that it never can be passed? Think of the *polis* of the Greek, the *res publica* of the Romans, or even *civitas*: [each] was not essentially based on ethnic groups. It could coincide, and on the whole it would be desirable to have a society which consists of members of the same ethnic group, but it was not essential. In the early nineteenth century that becomes paramount. When Hegel quotes Plato and Aristotle he invariably translates *polis* by *Volk*, which is of course an impossible mistranslation, philologically speaking. I believe the roots of this change have to be sought in Rousseau and Montesquieu. Hegel was aware of that; he quotes Montesquieu in this context. The nation as understood by Montesquieu and Rousseau was meant to be a natural group, a group which comes into being under the influence of nature, climate, and similarity of other conditions. These groups were thought to be the best preparation for the artifact called the state because it was not mere artifact; it had a natural and therefore healthy foundation. What Hegel is taking away [from][xxx] this "naturalistic" sense of the nation or ethnic group: it is spiritual, the folk mind. The only theoretical basis which I can discern is one to which he is not entitled, namely, the naturalistic principles of Montesquieu and Rousseau which he rejected.

It is clear that for Hegel, language is not of crucial importance. He has thought more probably of the ethnic character of religion prior to Christianity, both in Greece and Judea. Still that would not explain it, because these earlier religions have been superseded by Christianity. I don't know whether that is completely justified. If language is the matrix of all human understanding, then you have an easy way to ethnic groups, but that is not so in Hegel.

Every man is the son of his time, according to Hegel, and that means the philosopher as well as every other individual. To be the son of his time means his thought depends on certain presuppositions which do not originate in his own thought and which are really not evident to him. So every philosopher thinking in the age after the emergence of Christianity makes some Christian premises, regardless of whether he is orthodox, heretic, or even a denier of Christianity. The ultimate meaning of these premises is not clear to him; that becomes clear only in the final understanding, and this understanding is not brought about by theory. Theory did play a role in the process—the antithesis of the French Revolution was theory, but that led to terror and absurdities; although it was a very important part of the process, because only by this failure of all theory could theory find its rightful place, namely, a professor at the University of Berlin who teaches the wisdom of the Prussian state. This is presented in a caricature, but it is not altogether wrong. That was the objection which all opponents of Hegel made, especially Marx: that in Hegel's doctrine philosophy comes, in the Latin proverbial expression, *post festo*, after the festival. After everything is over, philosophy comes to explain that everything has been wisely done, wisely but unknowingly done.

[1] Deleted "And."
[2] Deleted "philistinian."
[3] Changed from: "so that we really would not know whether this is a blessing or not, but the ways of God are scrutable."
[4] Deleted "that."

[xxx] In the transcript: "What Hegel is take away"

[5] Deleted “such.”
[6] Deleted “say.”
[7] Deleted “more.”
[8] Deleted “this.”
[9] Moved “thereby.”
[10] Deleted “a change which is”
[11] Deleted “of.”
[12] Deleted “they consume it”
[13] Deleted “him”
[14] Deleted “was.”
[15] Deleted “that.”
[16] Deleted “consequences”
[17] Moved “no longer.”
[18] Deleted “to be.”
[19] Deleted “of.”
[20] Deleted “because.”
[21] Deleted “by.”
[22] Deleted “a whole.”

Session 13: no date
On *The Communist Manifesto*

Leo Strauss: [i]I discussed last time the emergence of Marx's problem, from Rousseau first and thereafter Hegel; and thus [I] was sketching the transformation of modern natural law into that kind of historical doctrine of which the Marxist doctrine is the most powerful as far as success is concerned, at least apparent success. I would like now to bring out the points where Marx explicitly criticizes Hegel. One thing is quite obvious: for Marx, the constitutional monarchy of the postrevolutionary scheme is not the resolution of the fundamental conflict, the conflict which had been the main theme of Rousseau. This consideration[ii] still abounds with inner problems, according to Marx. Democracy is more promising from the Marxist point of view, of course, but Marx criticizes democracy, political democracy, in the light of its own claims, namely, equality. And that brings him finally into his radically nonpolitical theme,[iii] nonpolitical insofar as his goal is concerned: by political means, revolution and establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, to bring about a condition which is no longer political but only social. The second crucial point in which he criticized Hegel concerns Hegel's "idealism." I state the position as presented by Marx and his followers without now going into the question whether this interpretation of Hegel does justice to Hegel. We can perhaps clarify that in the discussion. For Hegel, according to Marx, history is the autonomous development of the mind, meaning [that] the work through which man becomes man, produces himself, is "abstract intellectual activity," the activity of the mind striving to acquire full consciousness of itself. History is hypostatized. Hegel uses formulae like, "History does this and that," to which Marx rejoins: History does not do anything. Men, real living men, do everything.[iv] History is nothing but the activity of men who pursue their goals. Not ideas but the interests of men produce history. In passing I would remark that in the distinction between ideas and interests Marx is, I think, the father of the modern distinction between values and facts. It was a somewhat more meaningful distinction.

What Marx has in mind at this point is Hegel's so-called pantheism. The mind of which Hegel speaks is not just the human mind but the world mind, the World Spirit. This half-theological doctrine, if I may call it that, had been attacked prior to Marx by the German philosopher Feuerbach, and Feuerbach is the real father of a school called Humanism. This Humanism in the sense of a philosophic creed originates with Feuerbach—that was in the '30s and '40s of the nineteenth century. According to Feuerbach, Hegel's philosophy is a disguised theology; and therefore, since theology proper has been refuted by Hegel, Hegel's position is merely a halfway house. We have to take back to men what man has lent to God or gods. In other words, Feuerbach's position is a frank atheism. God is merely man's ideal hypostasized. This leads to a

[i] The transcriber notes that portions of the transcript were corrected. This version of the transcript incorporates the corrections. The transcriber notes: "All of these natural right lectures should be read bearing in mind that they contain numerous mistakes, not a few of which affect the meaning of important passages."
[ii] In the transcript: "consideration (?)"
[iii] In the transcript, following "theme": "scheme (?)"
[iv] *The German Ideology*, see *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978), 149-50.

very great practical consequence. I quote Feuerbach: "The denial of the better life in heaven implies the demand that things ought to be better, that they must be better on earth. It transforms the better future out of the object of inactive belief into the object of human activity."[v]

The consequence, in other words: politics must become our religion. Marx accepts that absolutely, and this implies two points. First of all, that revealed religion has been refuted by the rationalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I remind you of Paine's argument in *The Age of Reason*. But going beyond that, the position which Paine still took, which is usually called Deism, has been refuted by modern natural science, and so there is no longer any rational basis for any belief in God. Therefore [the] second point: it becomes necessary to explain religion or the belief in God in psychological terms. And the suggestion of Feuerbach is that religion is an illusory satisfaction of human wants. Man knows and feels his incompleteness, and that which he needs as a complement to become perfect is objectivated as God. And the real thing would be, of course, according to Feuerbach, that men should try to become actually a complete being and not to hypostatize that which is lacking into a transcendent but nonexistent being.

Marx accepts all these things, but he adds this consideration: that psychological explanation is not enough. To destroy the religious delusion, one must destroy the conditions which produce the need for that delusion. Religion is not merely an expression of human misery but it is also a protest against that misery, and that protest must however be carried on effectively, and that is no longer done by religion. [The] psychological explanation is not enough. Religion must be explained in terms of society, for [the] defects of society are illusorily healed and thus disguised by religion. Those of you who know of more recent discussions will recognize the issue between Freud and Marx in the issue between Feuerbach and Marx, because Freud of course in this respect takes up the Feuerbachean line of the psychological explanation of what they think is a delusion.

Now Marx calls his position dialectical materialism, and this twofold expression points to the two sources of Marx's doctrine: dialectical[1] refers to Hegel; and materialism refers to that, especially French, eighteenth-century materialism which was such an important part of Marx's heritage. Materialism refers obviously to the body; and dialectical refers not to the mind but to creativity. Marx of course found a concept which effected as it were a synthesis of two things: body and creativity. And that is the key concept of Marx, and all of you know, I believe, what that concept is. What concept presupposes both body and creativity? Productivity. Hegel has developed this for the first time in his criticism of political economy, in which he makes fundamentally this point. He takes issue with the vulgar distinction, as he calls it, between production, distribution, exchange and consumption. Marx rejects that in the name of the primacy of production. Consumption, even, is an element of production.

I don't want to go into this highly Hegelian and therefore scholastic discussion of Marx, but that is simply the result which is important. I mention only a few points. Marx himself says that consumption is the completion of production. Obviously, common sense tells you that. One could therefore raise the question: Should *consumption* not therefore be the guiding conception—or *use*, to use another term of the Aristotelian older view? But Marx argues that

[v] Presumably Strauss's translation. See Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (1843), trans. George Eliot (Digireads.com Publishing, 2012).

what is consumed, or rather what is the goal of the whole process of consumption depends on the status of production, and therefore production is the decisive point. We therefore have to consider something which I believe affects not only the problem of Marx but of much of modern thought in general, that the very concept of production has been enormously enlarged beyond its original meaning. Here even if we disregard completely the fact that production is somehow overarching distribution, exchange, and consumption, if you take the difference in production—shoes are obviously produced, but we say with equal ease the production of wheat as well as the production of shoes, but I think there is a great difference. These differences of course are completely blurred, because from the point of view of economics, in terms of [the] market, it doesn't make any difference whether it is wheat or shoes—although for a more clear understanding, this distinction would be absolutely crucial. If one makes only the attempt to translate these terms into Greek, in[to] the language of Aristotle—who discussed these matters for the first time, at least within our knowledge—one sees the problem here. But this only in passing.

Let us try to clarify what Marx means by production. The production is primarily not of ideas but of things for use. That is the objection to Hegel. The objection to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century materialistic, or half-materialistic, thinkers is this. Production is used in contradistinction to satisfaction of pre-given wants. All these thinkers—I mention only Locke—thought primarily in terms of satisfaction of pre-given wants. And also, if you take Rousseau's *Second Discourse*, the notion is [that] man adjusts himself to a pre-given environment. The emphasis was on men being acted upon, not on man's activity. That is now radically changed, and the philosophical basis for this change is supplied by German idealistic philosophy, which claimed to be a philosophy of freedom, of the spontaneity of man as distinguished from man's being acted upon by [a] material or corporeal environment. Production is the creative activity which satisfies wants. Certain natural wants are there, but the satisfaction of wants requires radical spontaneity of man. Production therefore liberates man from the natural wants, and through this activity man liberates himself and even produces himself. In other words, man produces not only things for satisfying his wants but by this very fact becomes a human being. The wants themselves are created by production. I think that makes sense.

Yet, and this is the crucial point, man is also enslaved by his production. In order to produce, man has to stand in [a] certain relation with his fellow producers, and these are called by Marx relations of productivity. These relations appeared to man not as the product of the process of production but as independent of his free activity. The relations of productivity are, as Marx put it, reified. They appear as things, unchanged and unchangeable, which antedate production; and the classic cases of such reification are so-called ideologies. And all religion is from Marx's point of view such a reified appearance of the relations of productivity. In capitalistic society, these reified relations of productivity appear in the guise of economic laws, meaning laws which are as independent of human doings as laws of nature.

Now the whole process of productivity throughout the ages is the transition from necessity to freedom, from dependence to masterdom, from brute to man. But this freedom or this sovereignty of man is possible only as sovereignty of society, not as sovereignty of [the] individual, because the productive process is a social process. And here is where Marx rejoins Rousseau, but with this difference: [2]for Rousseau there remains an ultimately insoluble problem

in the relation of individual and society. This is denied by Marx. Only as a member of a free society, of a society which is not subject to its own products but which controls its products, meaning in a society which controls the means of production, can an individual be free. Man must be a member of a collectivistic society. He must be completely collectivized in order to be free. The end is then perfect freedom. But this perfect freedom means also perfect productivity. One can—I would like to mention again in passing[3] to show the connection[4] with[vi] the modern natural right doctrine: the origin of the concept of production would have to be sought in Locke, in Locke's concept of labor as the origin of all value, whereas according to the older notion labor was by no means the origin of all value; nature [was] much more, or at least as much. Labor is the origin of all value. Without human labor the gifts of nature are almost completely worthless. Labor is the origin of all value. But this understanding is not limited to labor in the literal sense of the term in Locke; it applies to all human activity. Concepts according to Locke are creatures of the understanding. In other words, understanding is itself a kind of labor, of productive labor. Understanding is not a fundamentally passive act in which we grasp something; it presupposes this pre-activity, essentially. That has . . . When later on Kant speaks of the spontaneity of human understanding which *is* understanding, understanding as a spontaneous, creative, organizing act, however you might call it, that is certainly very close to what Locke means. That is all important for an understanding of Marx's doctrine.

The difference between Marx and Locke is very simple. According to Locke the labor which produces value is the labor of man, of the appropriating individual, to which Marx makes this objection already antedating Marx,[vii] that it is never the individual which appropriates because there is always, as Locke in a way admitted, division of labor; and division of labor is of crucial importance. When you say "division of labor," you say already society, by virtue of which division of labor is possible. So production or labor is social labor, social production.

A few more points in the form of a[5] [summary] and then we may perhaps have a discussion. One can say that the starting point of Marx is the principle of equality, the democratic principle which had been underlying the whole modern natural right development but became gradually divorced from the natural right doctrine. And the reason why that was so I have said[6] in a former meeting. Equality means all men are by nature equal, but this equality, this natural equality can only be found in the state of nature. In every other state there is an admixture of the nonnatural, the conventional, the artificial, which may destroy the natural basis. Therefore we have to go back to the state of nature to establish the precise meaning of equality. But in Rousseau's incisive criticism, the state of nature proved to be a subhuman state. Therefore, if the state of nature is really the basis and the root of equality, equality loses its theoretical basis; and so if you want to preserve equality for whatever reasons you have to divorce the demand of equality from the state of nature and projections of that kind. And that has certainly happened in Marx, so that equality appears rather as the goal of a long process of history than as the natural and eternal and permanent starting point or permanent basis of human life. Now as for equality, Marx asserts that political democracy does not bring true equality but only a formal equality, equality before the law. In fact, he says democracy is the rule of a class: the bourgeoisie. And this reveals a broader phenomenon according to Marx, namely, the conflict of classes. At all times, if we disregard the

[vi] In the transcript: "(?with)."

[vii] Presumably Strauss means Adam Smith's discussion of the division of labor in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), book 1, chapters 1-3.

first period, there was conflict of classes, and this conflict does not allow of a peaceful or harmonious solution. A harmonious solution is absolutely impossible.

Now what about these classes? What has this to do with the principle of productivity? Answer: The differentiation of classes is based on the process of production; and therefore the conflict of class, the class struggle, changes. There is a sequence of different classes. For example, the medieval nobility is a different class from the modern bourgeoisie. This sequence of classes is an intelligible process. In other words, it can be shown that the modern bourgeoisie had to be preceded by a medieval nobility, let me say, whereas the other [way around] would have been impossible. This intelligible process is what Marx means by the historical process. But there is this peculiarity of capitalist society and of the capitalist class within capitalist society [which is different] from any earlier society, because here a class comes into being which is essentially different from any former class, a class whose selfish interest[s] coincide with the interests of humanity. All former classes had particular interests which were not simply identical with the interests of humanity, but[7] the proletariat, the free wage labor of capitalist society,[8] is the only class which cannot liberate itself from its subjection except by liberating everyone. Therefore it is, one could say, the absolute class. In Marx's formulation [in] the *Communist Manifesto*: "The proletarian movement is the independent movement of the immense majority in the interests of the immense majority."[viii] You see here the connection between the Marxist principles and democratic principles, the assumption being that what is being done by the immense majority in the interests of the immense majority is not subject to any higher criterion. Another quotation: "The theoretical propositions of the communists . . . are only general expressions of factual relations of an existing class struggle, of an historical movement which takes place before our eyes."[ix] Meaning the theoretical propositions of the communists are not expressing ideals; they are expressing nothing but the actual aspirations of a given class. And from this point of view there is no difference as Marx sees it between the demands of the modern proletariat and the demands of any other class. But [there are] two differences. In the first place, here we have for the first time a class according to Marx which frankly says what it wants, which is not in need of ideological disguise. And secondly,[9] connected with that,[10] [this] is the first time that a class has a selfish aspiration, [and] whose selfish aspiration coincides with the interests of mankind at large. And therefore it is the absolute class. I think you recognize the similarity of that with Hegel's notion: there is an absolute time, absolute historical situation in which the fulfillment has taken place or is about to take place. Only what Hegel located in postrevolutionary Europe, especially in France and Germany, is located by Marx in the proletariat.

Now a few more points taken strictly from the *Communist Manifesto*. Now what is Marx's criticism of democracy? Answer: Democracy is not equality but rule of a class, of the bourgeoisie; and secondly, democracy presents itself as the rule of law, opposed to any violence, conquest and so on, but democracy itself has a revolutionary origin and therefore the rule of law is not its root. Capitalist order is not the natural order of society as classical economics had claimed, but has itself a revolutionary origin—the enclosures[x] and other things, purely

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[viii] *Communist Manifesto, The Marx-Engels Reader*, 482.

[ix] *Communist Manifesto, The Marx-Engels Reader*, 484.

[x] Strauss refers to the enclosure of common land in Britain that took place starting in the eighteenth century to make agricultural production more efficient. Most farms were small plots established on common land, for which farmers paid rent to the land owner. When landowners determined that larger

revolutionary and partly illegal actions, brought about the existence of this society. Therefore it lacks that moral prestige which it presents today. And therefore it is possible . . . a revolutionary action against a revolutionary establishment is legitimate; that's the implication. The third and last point: capitalism has replaced disguised exploitation by undisguised exploitation, meaning that there was always exploitation of the many by the few, but in former times it was always disguised, by religion especially and by other lofty principles. In capitalist society we have for the first time an undisguised exploitation. A disenchantment of the world has taken place by means of modern science, both natural and social, and only in this atmosphere where exploitation appears for the first time in its naked form can exploitation be abolished.

Now the characteristics of the bourgeoisie according to Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*. What is the guarantee that now the abolition of exploitation, injustice, and so on is possible? What is the characteristic of the bourgeois society? In the first place, we see a tendency towards two classes only, a polarization of society, bourgeoisie and proletariat, and the complex hierarchies of former times have completely disappeared. Secondly, as I mentioned before, undisguised exploitation, destruction of religion, sentiment, etc.: the disenchantment. The relation between exploiters and exploited is merely a cash relation and no longer a relation disguised by religion and sentiment. Third, this new society is superior in power to any earlier ruling class—Marx refers here to modern technology. Fourth, this society is, in the language of the present day, a dynamic society. There is constant revolution going on of production and of the relations of production, and therefore of all social relations. And fifth, this society is the first society of a truly global character. There exists a world market in a nonmetaphoric sense, which means the mutual dependence of all nations on each other; and this regards gradually cultural matters as well as economic matters in the narrow sense of the term. The next point: in this global society the urban element has won out over the rural element. In other words, this modern capitalistic society is fundamentally an urban society, even if there are some vast patches of rural life, which however are gradually transformed and remade in the image of the town. The seventh point—and particularly interesting today, and reading like a satire on what we have seen in Lenin and elsewhere: this new society, the bourgeois society, has created an absolute dependence of the barbaric nations on civilized nations. In other words, a great guarantee of reasonableness in the future, a radical dependence of the peasant nations on the industrial nations, and—the Oriental students won't mind my saying it; I just quote Marx—a radical dependence of the Oriental nations on the Occidental nations. In other words, the [. . .][xi] of freedom, civilization, and so on is now *guaranteed* to be victorious. The civilized industrial Occidentals have the whole power in[11] [their] hands, and therefore whoever will be victorious in the civilized industrial Occident will rule the whole world by this very fact. And the eighth point which I would like to make concerns the accumulation of population, the centralization of the means of production, the concentration of property in a few hands, which opens the way for the political centralization on a hitherto unknown scale, and therefore for the relatively simple process of a universal revolution because of the centralization of power.

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plots would be more productive, much of the common land was "enclosed," often leaving small farmers with poor plots that had no access to wood or water and prompted them to move to cities in search of work. The Enclosure Act was passed in 1801, but the practice was common well before that date.

[xi] In the transcript: "herds (?)" "Herds" seems unlikely.

Now why is such a revolution necessary? Well, you know the famous Marxist thesis. The inadequacies of the bourgeois order are, in the first place, the commercial crises, epidemics of overproduction which are inevitable because there is no control of production; and secondly, connected with that, the ever-increasing pauperization of the proletarian masses. By this very fact[xii] capitalism necessarily produces its own destroyer, the proletariat, but in such a way that this destroyer, constituted as it is by capitalist society, offers the guarantee that his victory will be a victory of civilization and not the destruction of civilization. The industrial workers, being molded by this highly civilized industrial society, have the greatest interest indeed in its radical revolutionary transformation but at the same time in preserving the level of production, and therewith also the level of the intellectual production, as one could say. This was Marx's fond hope.

I read to you only a few passages which have more directly to do with the issue of natural law—natural right. I take them from the *Communist Manifesto*:

"'Besides, there are eternal truths, freedom, justice, and so on, which are common to all social conditions. But communism abolishes the eternal truth. It abolishes religion and morality.'" [That's the objection, and Marx says—LS] What is the meaning of this accusation? The history of all previous society moved through class conflicts and class oppositions which in different epochs took on a different character, but regardless of which form they did take on the exploitation of one part of society by the other has been common to all previous centuries. No wonder therefore that the consciousness of society, the social consciousness of all centuries, has moved within certain common forms which will completely disappear only with the complete disappearance of the class conflict."[xiii]

Now what does he mean? There are no eternal truths. There are no permanent truths such as are implied in the idea of natural right. And if people make the objection, "But throughout the ages, when you read Homer or Plato or the Bible and so on, are there not certain things which we see in exactly the same way although they belong to different epochs?," Marx says, That's very simple: in these different societies there were class conflicts. Something was in common; and this simple, little but important community of . . . namely, the existence of exploitation of one or more classes by others makes possible the permanence of certain simple ideas throughout the ages. With the disappearance of the class situation, a completely novel moral understanding will take place and all these so-called eternal or permanent truths will then be ripe for the historical dustpan. The question of course is: How can one use such a term[12] [as] exploitation and freedom if there are not some [sorts][xiv] of standards? That is of course the great question, to which I would like to turn now. But first I would like to see whether I have made clear enough the problem.

Student: That is, that Marx's new morality is the true natural right in terms of which the whole history of class struggle becomes intelligible?

[xii] That is, the pauperization of the proletarian masses.
[xiii] Strauss's translation. See *Communist Manifesto*, part 2, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 489.
[xiv] In the transcript: "(?sources)"

LS: No. There cannot be natural right, because the whole process of man consists in overcoming nature. And therefore a right which would be natural would by this very fact be bad. A man produces himself through the historical process; therefore law or right belonging to the nature of man as something eternal would be something absolutely meaningless, and certainly no longer meaningful at the end of this kind of historical process which culminates in freedom. Of course the question is: How does Marx know that this final stage is superior to all other stages? We turn to that question later.

Student: Where do these new moral concepts originate from? If they proceed initially from class conflicts, where do they come from now? Individuals, or—i.e., the new moral concepts that will come after class conflict has been eliminated. You said that a new moral ideology would evolve.

LS: That would be impossible.[13] Ideology would disappear altogether. Ideology for Marx is something untrue, something which disguises the real power relations. The moment power relations have been abolished, there is no place for ideology.

Student: But you said there would arise a new morality, though.

LS: Yes, surely it would. But what is its status? Well, how does it work? Now let me first try to explain this from another angle. Marx presupposes, naturally, a certain moral tradition. I mean, when he uses such terms like "freedom" or "justice," these words have a certain meaning and especially in their connection . . . From Marx it was obvious that the way in which Rousseau, say, had spoken about it was fundamentally what he meant by these words. A true society, a genuine society is a society in which all men are free—are free. What does freedom mean? [14][Having] the freedom of fully developing their faculties. That is somehow dogmatically presupposed. (We come to that later.) So in other words, there is no problem. Everyone would grant that, even quite a few anti-Marxists. You know, when people speak of self-realization today, most of them are not Marxists. So the question is then simply this: In a way, we know what the right life is, so how can we get it? And there's the issue. People mostly said: Let us have a free society, free democratic society, with free elections, vote, and so on. And Marx says: Measure this liberal democratic capitalistic society by the standard of self-realization. Of course the standard itself is a problem, but if it is granted rather generally, it is for practical purposes sufficient to measure the society by that standard. And that is the main work of Marx.

Now how does he do that? Well, he would say: How about self-realization of people living in slum areas? And all this kind of difficulty. The ordinary liberal democrat will say: Well, that's very bad and we will try to change it; it will take some time, and so on. Marx would say: It is impossible to change. That is the crucial point: it is impossible because there are people who have an *interest* in the situation as it is. For example, he would refer to real estate people—you know the same arguments used by non-Marxist liberals also. The principle is this. There is fundamentally a class conflict between, say, haves and have-nots, however you might call them, between the capitalists proper and the proletariat and those who are bound to become proletarians, [meaning][15] the farmers and the so-called white-collar workers, and so on and so on. And that was the very simple scheme from which Marx started. Still, the question is in no way disposed of. But what is the precise moral problem? The precise moral problem [is], I think, in the first place, the use of violence and of all other means, like fraud and so on, in order to

prepare revolutionary change. That is one great problem. And ultimately of course the problem of the standard remains, because Marx's notion of self-realization is a somewhat more specific one than the one which is generally appealed to. I will speak of that later. But what I wanted to point out now is only this: the explicit denial of any permanent standards, based on the fact that there is no permanent human nature. Or rather, that what is permanent is least relevant; say, the digestive apparatus and the formal structure of sense perception and memory probably doesn't change, but that is not humanly important. The humanly important things do change and they do change radically, and therefore there cannot be any meaningful standards which are permanent. So Marx says, therefore, there is a semblance of appearance when we find certain notions which we cherish in the Bible or in Homer, but the semblance of appearance is due [to the fact] that both Homer and the Bible and we live in class-ridden societies. But still we have a general notion throughout the analysis in Marx, of course, of how the good society would look, the final society. It would be a perfectly free and a perfectly just society: free because it is just, and just because it is free. We must naturally elucidate [that]. At the moment I was only concerned with this crucial point: the simple rejection of any notion of natural right or natural law, without which no word of Marx is intelligible. This premise of course is not peculiar to Marx, although Marx did perhaps more than anyone else in this early period to expel it.

Student: [. . .]

LS: Yes, but I think Marx would say . . . That is the greatest difficulty in every Marxist discussion, because a clear statement of what the end is is evaded all the time. The emphasis is only on the analysis of the present situation, which allegedly points to one alternative only. And that alternative is either the destruction of all civilization or else the communist world state, the socialist world state to be followed by the communist world society. That is the typical character of Marxism, I think from the very beginning, perhaps a bit more strongly today than it was in Marx himself. That certain notions of human goodness are presupposed in this whole scheme—because one could conceivably say: Maybe the destruction of civilization is better than [. . .][xv] In a way, they would admit of course that they have such a notion, but they would say: Why is this not in any way natural right or anything of this kind? Answer: Because this could not possibly have been visualized except in our period. You see, when you speak of natural right and natural law you imply that these are standards which are in principle accessible to the human mind at all times, which may accidentally not be accessible because people are too poor to think and this kind of thing, but [are] in principle, whereas in this historicist notion the view prevails that the true or final goal becomes accessible only with the emergence of a certain historical situation. In other words, what is the true goal of man would be wholly meaningless to earlier men. I don't know whether that is clear—I mean, the thought is in itself not clear, but as far as it can be.

Now let us discuss briefly the Marxist attitude toward morality. Marx explicitly rejects all morality. We shall see what he means by that. In one of his earlier works which was published only long after his death, *[The] German Ideology*, where he discusses German philosophical doctrines—and in a way, it is the most philosophic of Marx's writings—he rejects all morality, making a distinction between two kinds of morality: ascetic morality, which is guided by the idea of duty; or morality of pleasure or enjoyment. What is wrong with that? Answer: All moral teachings address themselves to all human beings indiscriminately, teaching, in other words, all

[xv] The transcript has a blank space with a question mark.

men to do their duty or to seek their pleasure. But Marx argues: Since men are different, and especially since there is a difference of classes, all morality is necessarily hypocrisy. Every morality is in fact the expression of the conditions of existence of the ruling class and nothing else. Now why is every moral teaching hypocritical? It makes a difference whether you preach duty, meaning abstention from pleasure, to the inhabitants of palaces or to the inhabitants of slums, doesn't it? More particularly, morality implies that the individual can become good, or at least better. It exhorts the individual to goodness, but this exhortation is based on an abstraction from the conditions of goodness; therefore morality as morality leads to hypocrisy or to inactivity.

One could of course say that this alleged criticism of all morality is itself based on a specific morality. In other words, does not this alleged rejection of all morality not lead to a new type of morality? In a most recent Marxist writer, perhaps the most reasonable—not the most reasonable but the most intelligent of the western Marxist writers, Lukács (I believe this [work] is not available in English, only German and French), he says: "The class consciousness is the ethics of the proletariat."[xvi] Now what does it mean? When we go back to the very beginnings of modern political philosophy, modern philosophy, we find the attempt made by Machiavelli to find a substitute for morality fundamentally on the same grounds as Marx does, namely, morality—that means exhortation, teaching—ineffective. We must have another guidance for human action, and Machiavelli may be said to have found a substitute for morality in patriotism, say, collective self-interest. That is something which we don't have to preach. It grows up in every society because anyone can be brought to feel that all members of society are in one boat, and so on. There is of course a certain amount of sacrifice that is required on the part of the individual, but that has a kind of immediate reward on earth in the well-being of society. Now the ethics of the proletariat is the patriotism of the proletarian, and just as all kinds of very generous and self-denying actions are possible on the basis of patriotism, they are possible also on the basis of the ethics of the proletariat.

Another point of the Marxist attitude toward morality, which I take from Engels . . . Well, of course people admit that there is a difference between good and bad, or good and evil, surely, but that is only superficially so important because we see that evil is very frequently a driving force in history. Now if we assume for one moment that the historical process is a progressive process and we owe the good things we have now to evil things, we can't condemn evil things as easily as we otherwise would. In other words, the good is the progressive, the evil is the reactionary; and then by replacing the distinction between good and evil by the distinction between progressive and reactionary, we have already half-abolished morality. Now quite a few people who are not Marxists did that and do that. We can also state this as follows: the end, the final and common good of humanity, justifies any means. We keep the question of end in mind.

[xvi] Presumably Strauss's translation. *History and Class Consciousness* (1923). In the case of some of the passages quoted by Strauss in the discussion that follows, his English translation is close to *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971). In other cases, it is difficult to be sure, and this is one of the cases. See "Whether an action is functionally right or wrong is decided ultimately by the evolution of proletarian class consciousness," *History and Class Consciousness*, 199.

Other remarks of Engels, again based on Hegel, and ultimately on Machiavelli: the motivations of individuals are irrelevant for the total result of the historical movements. Again a fundamentally Machiavellian thought. The clever tyrant is more desirable from the point of view of the common good than an inefficient and inept well-intentioned ruler. That makes, within limits, some sense. Now radicalize that: what the motivation of the individual is is wholly irrelevant. What he does and what [is] the salutary effect of what he does, that is the point. The moral issue is not important. Of course, they would say it makes a difference whether the capitalist is an honest man or a scoundrel; they admit that, but they would say: How trivial is that compared with the issue of bourgeoisie and proletariat. In a way, the nice bourgeois is more dangerous to the progress of humanity than the wicked bourgeois, obviously, because he obfuscates the issue by charity. Another example: It goes without saying that from Marx's principles slavery is something absolutely bad, ultimately. But as Engels points out, without slavery, no Greek state, no Greek art and science; without slavery, no Roman Empire. Slavery was necessary. But today slavery is abolished, not because people have become more enlightened but because it would be incompatible with the productive processes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and so on. A man who is trying to reconcile Hegel and Marx, M. Kojève,[xvii] in his introduction to Hegel's philosophy, says, tracing the whole thing to Hegel: There is no moral philosophy in Hegel, who is hostile to the moralists; there is only a philosophy *of* morality. Its sole axiom is: The individual must live in conformity with the manners and customs of the people within which he lives, as long as the morals of this people correspond to the spirit of the time; that is to say, as long as they are solid and resist[16] revolutionary criticisms and attacks. Otherwise he perishes as criminal or as insane. I believe that it is a bit too abbreviated Hegel [. . .] but however this may be, from this point to Marxism is only one step. The question which we have to raise later is of course still the question of the end, of the end condition.

A few more points only. Now in a way we may say all his thought is based on the equation of the good with the progressive. So in other words, you don't have to raise fundamental questions if you know that; then you simply know that your period, the society in which you live, is superior to all earlier societies. You take its standards and by acting [. . .] of them you act as decently[17] as man possibly can. By such actions you will be contributing to further progress. Fundamentally that is the way in which Marx would say this. In a capitalist society, in modern society, morality consists in living in accordance with that society, period. Yes, but there are certain people there who cannot possibly live in inner loyalty to that society because they are outcasts from that society, the proletariat. Their [. . .] is dictated by the situation; no question is needed. And that means of course revolutionary action is needed; and therefore an ethics of revolution with this and this goal, and so on.

Still, this equation of the good and the progressive presupposes that there is progress. It presupposes more specifically that the end of the process is what Marx calls the realm of freedom, meaning a condition in which all men are free and equal, effective[ly].[xviii] Certain

[xvii] Alexandre Kojève (1902-1968), Russian émigré philosopher who settled in Paris, probably the most prominent Hegelian of the century. Strauss and Kojève maintained an extensive philosophic correspondence. In his remarks, Strauss refers to Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. James Nichols (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).
[xviii] In the transcript: "effective (?)"

questions arise already on this level. Even if this prediction of the end is correct, can the realm of freedom be established by a moratorium on morality lasting for many generations? In other words, is there not a certain discrepancy between the means used to bring about the so-called realm of freedom and the realm of freedom itself? For Marx it was very simple, because people who were, as he saw it, manifestly right in their claims, the proletariat, against people who were manifestly wrong, that did not imply any moral declaration. But in the moment the devices of Molotov[xix] and so on are needed to bring it about, it is obvious that this problem arises [of] whether these are the means for making people truly human. The second is: How do we know that the end of the process is the realm of freedom and not universal and perpetual tyranny? And third, if the ultimate and unintended outcome of human actions is unknown, as for example even of such actions as [those] of Marx's proletariat, we are simply forced to look beyond the historical process itself and to try to take our bearings by what is right, in itself, beyond the process.

Now let us look at the Marxist notion of the end. The whole Marxist thesis doesn't make sense except on the basis of a very definite notion of a truly human life. Now this truly human life might be transmoral in the sense that it transcends morality as ordinarily and traditionally understood. Nevertheless, Marxism agrees with all moral teachings in that it attempts to give an answer to the question of what is the right life. Only on the basis of this notion can Marxism castigate the inhumanity of capitalist society, and indeed of all forms of precommunist society. Now what is that? I read to you a passage from Lukács: "Communist society will be the first society in the history of mankind which takes seriously and actually puts into practice the demand for freedom of the individual."[xx] What is freedom of the individual, of course? Answer, taken from Engels (I could also take Lenin): Freedom means free development of all faculties of each, full self-realization. From Lenin's *State and Revolution*: "An order without quotation marks, an order which has nothing to do with wage slavery, an order in which the more and more simplified functions of control and accounting will be performed by each in turn, will then become a habit, and will finally die out as special functions of a *special* stratum of the population."[xxi]

That's the practical meaning of that; in other words, that *all* men will develop *all* their faculties. I quote from Marx: "Not duty or enjoyment but satisfaction of desires is the goal."[xxii] In other words, whereas according to Marx all traditional morality was either morality of duty or morality of pleasure, the real decisive consideration should be satisfaction of desires, so that no single desire acquires exclusive power over us. In other words, no obsession. Activity in every respect, and therefore the cultivation of all our faculties. The vocation of man is this universal

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[xix] Vyacheslav Molotov (1890-1986), Bolshevik leader and, during the Stalin era, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars (1930-41) and First Deputy Premier (1942-57). With Stalin, he ordered the purges of the government and the Red Army.

[xx] *History and Class Consciousness,* 315.

[xxi] Vladimir I. Lenin, *State and Revolution* (New York: International Publishers, 1932), 43; henceforth *State and Revolution*. (This is the same translation, though it is uncertain whether it is the same edition from which Strauss reads.)

[xxii] This is a theme of *Marx's Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and of *The German Ideology*.

development of the faculties of each, as distinguished from one-sided development.[xxiii] Now what is the root of the one-sided development? Answer: The division of labor.[xxiv] —Man has one job, maybe two, but not all; and therefore it follows already from this that the abolition of the division of labor, and therefore the abolition of the class society, is the condition for human fulfillment. In a communist society, that universal development is no longer a vocation, however, meaning an ideal, but actual life: all men actually will develop all their faculties. In the communist society, there will be no painters but at most human beings who among other things also paint. Up to now man has been crippled by the division of labor and by the division of society into classes. In the communist society, every man will develop all his faculties. Great question: Are there not natural differences among men, in other words, some who would be good painters and others not? Even those natural differences or gifts will be abolished in the end by eugenics. And you see from this point why the history of Lysenko, which seemed to be such a silly thing for a statesman like Stalin to interfere with, is absolutely essential to the Marxist doctrine, of course.[xxv] I mean, if man's natural gifts cannot be brought completely under Marxist control, the realization of the Marxist ideal is absolutely impossible; therefore Lysenko must be right. In the communist society, everyone can develop all his faculties: "He can go hunting in the morning [I quote Marx—LS], fishing in the afternoon, raise in cattle raising in the evening [I don't know whether that's so easy . . . when the sun has set, but some can probably be taken care of in the . . . —LS]. After dinner he can engage in literary criticism, just as he likes, without ever becoming a hunter, a fisher, a cowherd or a critic."[xxvi] That is the meaning of the realm of freedom as distinct from the realm of necessity. In the realm of necessity there is a cleavage in human life between work and self-realization. In the realm of freedom there is a coincidence of work and self-realization.

Naturally an infinite number of questions come to our minds. In the first place, is[18] self-realization [really] a self-evident goal? Does Marx not want to make all men into jacks of all trades, like the famous sophist Hippias in Greek times: his belt was made by him, his speeches were made by him, and I suppose his shoes and shirts too. The natural differences among men are [. . .] in a way consistent, because if the process of civilization is the process of conquering nature, why should they not go to that point where even the natural differences among men would be eventually abolished by a reasonably-guided eugenics? I believe one could say that the natural differences among men are more likely to lead to the fact that this disregard will bring about, in Marx's own language, merely a hypocritical solution, that all men will pretend to be all-sided and not really to [. . .] In other words, it will become a mere passion. To say nothing of the fact that the formulation "From each according to his ability"—the famous formulation of the principle of justice in Marxism—would seem to show that there is some difference of abilities among men. But maybe he meant only the difference of age; I don't know.

[xxiii] The transcriber notes here: "(Foregoing probably a quote)"

[xxiv] There was a break in the tape at this point.

[xxv] Soviet biologist Trofim Lysenko (1898-1976) was appointed by Stalin as the director of the Institute of Genetics at the USSR's Academy of Sciences, a position he occupied from 1940-65. By the middle of the 1950s, however, Lysenko's theory that acquired characteristics were inherited was largely rejected even in the Soviet Union, where he played a promiment political role. Because of his prominence, his slow loss of power—from being challenged in the early to middle 1950s to losing his position as director in 1965—received significant media attention in the United States.

[xxvi] Strauss's translation. Marx, *The German Ideology*, part 1, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 160.

Furthermore, there is this difficulty, this theoretical difficulty. The desire for the development of all faculties is of course not original, in the sense that according to the Marxist notion of human development at the beginning there were no such faculties. These faculties are themselves the product of historical development. The human being, in other words, which desires an all-sided development, meaning [the] Western world in the nineteenth century, is itself, it would seem, a product of capitalistic society. And we can even trace it back to the Renaissance, where some people thought of being "universal man"—you know, who has all the faculties developed. So that the very interesting question would arise [whether], if with the destruction of capitalistic society any man would give a darn for such an all-sided development, so that we all fight for a goal which with every further progress would become more and more ridiculous. You see that point? If you do not have some higher standard than your history . . . product of previous history, you can't be certain whether every further step in this direction is not destructive of your very ideas. Now of course in the usual Marxist discussion this question of the end is as a rule eluded and evaded, as I said. We can say this. It is a moot question whether there is any end which would justify all means, but I think we can safely say that only an end which is undeniably good could possibly justify the use of any means, and we must say that the end of communism is not undeniably good. It is at least an open question.

Now, how important this issue is for the fundamental theory of Marxism, although not frequently spoken of by Marxists, you can see from the following consideration. There is an obvious connection between this notion of the universal man and the withering away of the state, because the state means, naturally, a kind of personal division of labor. Even if you have a certain amount of rotating, for example, you would still need something like professionals in various fields—in the field of the army, and so on and so on. Now what about this withering away of the state, which is the practical aspect of that? Here we see what that means. I quote from Lenin:

"Take a factory, a railway, vessel on the high seas, said Engels—is it not clear that not one of these complex technical units, based on the use of machines and the ordered co-operation of many people, could function without a certain amount of subordination and, consequently, without some authority or power?

"When I put these arguments—writes Engels—up against the most rabid anti-authoritarians, they are only able to give me the following answer: Ah, that is true, but here it is not a case of authority conferred on the delegates, *but of a commission* which we give them. [And Engels adds—LS] These people think that they can change a thing by changing its name . . ." [xxvii]

Here is the place where Engels himself indicates the fact that a mere administration of things, as it is called as distinguished from the government of man, does not so easily work. But let us see what Lenin says further on:

[xxvii] *State and Revolution,* 52. Italics in original. Lenin notes at the start of the section from which Strauss reads, "Polemic Against the Anarchists," that "Marx and Engels contributed articles against the Proudhonists, 'autonomists' or 'anti-authoritarians,' to an Italian Socialist publication, and it was not until 1913 that these articles appeared in German translation in the *Neue Zeit*." (51)

"Engels emphasizes again and again that not only in a monarchy, but *also in a democratic republic*, the state remains a state, *i.e.* [which means that—LS], it retains its fundamental and characteristic feature of transforming the officials, "the servants of society," its organs, into the masters of society."

[And therefore we can't leave it at democracy, but must . . . —LS][xxviii]

"We set ourselves the ultimate aim of destroying the state, *i.e.*, [that is to say—LS] every organized and systematic violence, every use of violence against man in general."[xxix]

That will no longer be necessary, because every man will get what he really desires, namely, his self-realization. And what he today actually desires, for some men doubtless desire to lord it over others, is merely a consequence of the bad construction of society. If we have a properly constructed society these beastly desires simply won't emerge anymore:

"We do not expect the advent of an order of society in which the principle of subordination of minority to majority will not be observed. [In other words, there will be a state for the time being—LS] But, striving for Socialism, we are convinced that it will develop into Communism; that, side by side with this, there will vanish all need for force, for the *subjection* of one man to another, and of one part of the population to another, since people will *grow accustomed* to observing the elementary conditions of social existence *without force and without subjection*."[xxx]

LS: Let me . . .

"The expression 'the state *withers away*,' is very well chosen, for it indicates both the gradual and the elemental nature of the process. Only habit can, and undoubtedly will [undoubtedly will—LS] have such an effect; for we see around us millions of times how readily people get accustomed to observe the necessary rules of life in common, if there is no exploitation, if there is nothing that causes indignation, that calls forth protest and revolt and has to be *suppressed* . . .

"We are not Utopians, and we do not in the least deny the possibility and inevitability of excesses on the part of *individual persons*, nor the need to suppress *such* excesses [in the communist society, naturally—LS]. But, in the first place, no special machinery, no special apparatus of repression is needed for this; this will be done by the armed people itself, as simply and as readily as any crowd of civilised people, even in modern society, parts a pair of combatants or does not allow a woman to be outraged."[xxxi]

In other words, lynch justice will take the place of ordinary judicial procedure, and so on and so on. But I think it is important to realize the connection between this ultimate fantastic ideal of the universal man—you could also say, "Every inhabitant of the globe a Ph.D"—is the ultimate basis for the demand for the withering away of the state with its permanent distinction of functions.

[xxviii] *State and Revolution*, 64. Emphasis in original. This passage is in the context of remarks about Engels's 1891 preface to Marx's *Civil War in France*.
[xxix] *State and Revolution*, 68.
[xxx] *State and Revolution*, 68. Italics in original.
[xxxi] *State and Revolution*, 74, 75. Italics in original.

Furthermore, there is this question: Even granting that the Marxist end were reasonable and the good end, would it follow that men would be actually satisfied? Assuming, in other words, that a reasonable man wouldn't wish to be anything but the all-around human being in the Marxist sense, and granting that a communist society as sketched by Marx or Lenin would be the only means for that, would this prove that man would be actually satisfied by that? Is it not a strange "optimism" to expect that people are necessarily satisfied with what reasonable people would be satisfied with?

However this may be, the end of Marxism is extremely questionable, and let us see to what practical consequence that leads. Lenin: "From the bourgeois point of view, it is easy to declare such a social order "a pure Utopia," and to sneer at the Socialists for promising each the right to receive from society, without any control of the labour of the individual citizen, any quantity of truffles, automobiles, pianos, etc. Even now, most bourgeois "savants" deliver themselves of such sneers, thereby displaying at once their ignorance and their self-seeking defence of capitalism . . . " And therefore Lenin makes this remark:

"Until the 'higher' phase of Communism arrives, the Socialists demand the *strictest* control, *by society and by the state*, of the quantity of labour and the quantity of consumption; only this control must *start* with the expropriation of the capitalists, with the control of the workers over the capitalists, and must be carried out, not by a state of bureaucrats, but by a state of *armed workers*.

"Self-seeking defence of capitalism by the bourgeois ideologists (and their hangers-on like Tsereteli, Chernov and Co.) consists in that they *substitute* disputes and discussions about the distant future for the essential imperative questions of present-day policy—"[xxxii]

You see what this means. Questions of the end are discouraged. That is not practical now, the end state: let us discuss only what is required for the penultimate end. And this is of course dictatorship of the proletariat and all its trappings. I'm perfectly willing to follow him, but he demands too much. Why should we have the penultimate end? There is only one satisfactory answer: Because it leads to the ultimate end. But if the ultimate end is so fantastic, why should we choose the penultimate end? And there comes this other consideration to which I referred before: the penultimate end requires an enormous brutalization of man, an enormous strengthening of central state power, the complete abolition of independence, the most unscrupulous use of propaganda and lies. Are such means likely to promote a really good end? Can the end justify the means which are manifestly destructive of the end?

Now if this is really so, if the Marxist position is based on [an] absolutely fantastic notion of the end of man, how could it ever have carried any conviction? And not only in the parts of the world which are subject to the Red Army. I believe that if one wants to understand the practical success, there can be only one answer. The ultimate end was utterly irrelevant in this connection. What was important was the alleged fact that the penultimate end, the dictatorship of the proletariat, was thought to be preferable to the status quo. In other words, given the condition of capitalist society in some countries, that seemed to be so unsatisfactory that the alternative,

[xxxii] *State and Revolution,* 80.

dictatorship of the proletariat, was preferred without any regard, without any serious regard at least as to what Marx himself regarded as the ultimate outcome of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Now that was originally, as you know, the ever-increasing pauperization of the worker in Marx's own time; and now according to the more recent Marxist doctrine, monopoly capitalism leading to imperialism, exploitation of colonial peoples, and eventually to the third world war. And I think the argument which is now presented is really fundamentally this: short of the communization of the whole world, there will be a third world war. Whether a further analysis of the present situation would bear out this contention, I think I leave that to you and your own judgment.

There is of course a deeper reason behind this theoretically most unsatisfactory element of the Marxist doctrine. It could be shown, I believe, that this peculiar narrowness, the refusal to face the question of the ultimate end, is not limited to Marxism. In American instrumentalism of the Dewey type you have the same inclination. I would assume that this is partly due to a direct influence of Marx on Dewey. In other words, the simple and seemingly so practical objection is made: Well, face the problem today. You have here the danger of a depression in 1954, '55. Here there is a very urgent practical problem: think of a solution to that problem. That is good as far as it goes, but does not the question of a solution to a problem imply a certain notion of the direction in which the solution should be sought? Is this ever a foregone conclusion? I mean, you can solve the problem of a depression, I suppose, in very different ways. Now when you look at Dewey: fundamentally the same [. . .] as in Marx. He would say this: Concentrate on the particular situation and solve that problem; solve each situation on its own merits as intelligently and as humanely as you can. Well, but by making this little qualification—as intelligently and as humanely as you can—he notes[xxxiii] without realizing it the fundamental problem, namely: What does intelligent and humane handling of the situation mean? In other words, however different all individual situations may be, there is something which is in common to all situations, namely, that they ought to be handled decently. And the question is whether that is such a triviality which everyone knows or whether it is not in need of some clarification.

Something of this kind I think has happened in Marx, too. The tasks imposed on man by his historical situation are sufficiently clear to make irrelevant the question of the end. Now in Marx that has still a somewhat greater theoretical dignity because of the notion that there is a necessity of the historical process. In other words, what Marxism fundamentally says is that the problem of the end is solved by historical necessity. No serious difficulty can arise in any given situation of what should be done, because the historical situation establishes your goal. There are no alternatives. Therefore the understanding of historical necessity takes the place of political philosophy; or in other words, this philosophy of history takes the place of political philosophy. Just one quotation from Marx's *German Ideology*: "Present-day individuals must abolish private property, since the forces of production and the forms of exchange have developed to the extent that they have become forces of destruction as long as private property rules, and because the opposition of the classes has been pushed to its extreme."[xxxiv]

[xxxiii] In the transcript: "(?knows)

[xxxiv] Strauss's translation. See *The German Ideology*, trans. S. Ryazanskaya (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 483.

Now no question arises. Look at it: this is the present problem, and one and only one solution is possible. What further question do you have to raise? Now in the foreground[xxxv] of the discussion there has always been the notion—and that is connected with our problem: Is there really such a historical necessity as Marxism claims? Or as the question was frequently put: Is not such necessity incompatible with action? I believe the issue is not so simple as is sometimes presented in critics of Marxism. According to a common view, the knowledge of the necessity of a given outcome—say, of dictatorship of [the] proletariat or so—paralyzes the will, leads to fatalistic acquiescence in the course of events. To which the Marxist answer is as follows: Knowledge of the necessity of the outcome does not lead to fatalism if the outcome is desired and if I know that my desire, my action is a link in the course of change. In other words, there is a great difference[19] [between] whether I know the outcome of some cosmic event on which I have no influence whatever and which is wholly indifferent to me, or whether it is an event in human life on which I know I have some influence. X is forced by his situation in the proletariat to rebel against capitalist exploitation: necessity. And he is forced to desire the overthrow of the capitalist system; he cannot help thinking of ways and means of satisfying his desire. He observes that the capitalist system has serious weaknesses which must destroy it if the proletariat acts. The proletarian is forced to act by virtue of his insight into necessity. That makes sense, up to this point: dialectical materialism asserts a necessity, but a necessity of history, as they say, which means of the necessary outcome of human actions. The necessity would not exist if men did not act, if they were merely onlookers of the forces; and therefore there is no necessary conflict between necessity and action.

But of course that is very well in general terms. The semblance of consistency appears[xxxvi] when we look a little more closely. Is it true that the proletariat desires the overthrow of the capitalist system or that they desire it enough to be willing to fight for its overthrow, to die for the cause? Will they not prefer cheap sham solutions, social democratic opportunism, as they call it? If this should be the case—and it was a very great problem—the necessity breaks down. Sorel developed his doctrine which did away with necessity because he saw that it didn't work.[xxxvii] Lenin rejected this Bergsonianism—Bergson, the teacher of Sorel, who said there is no necessity of this kind.[xxxviii] Lenin went back to Hegel['s] teaching of necessity [. . .][xxxix] Lenin admits, that's the crucial point, that there is no situation in which there is no way out for capitalist society. In whatever situation capitalism may find itself, there will always be possibilities of purely economic solutions: [the] New Deal and such things. But whether these solutions are really possible depends on the proletariat. The proletariat, the action of the proletariat, closes the way out to capitalism. In other words, if the proletarians are cowards, capitalism can last forever. And therefore we must do something [so] that they are not cowards, and that means communist [. . .] It is indeed a consequence of the necessary development of the economy—that's necessary, that the proletariat has now this power to make or to break capitalist society, but there is no necessity that they will break it. Whether the proletariat will use that power depends on its

[xxxv] In the transcript: "foreground (?)"
[xxxvi] In the transcript: "semblance of consistency appears [meaning disappears?]"
[xxxvii] Georges Sorel (1847-1922) rejected socialist politics and argued that only through understanding myth and through the use of violence and general strikes would the workers be successful in achieving their aims. See *Reflections on Violence* (1908).
[xxxviii] Henri Bergson (1859-1941). See *Creative Evolution* (1907).
[xxxix] The transcriber notes: "Unintelligible sentence."

vitality, and above all on its leadership, the Communist Party. The Party therefore must counteract what they call the ideological crisis of the proletariat, which means, in other Marxist terms, the transformation of the proletariat into petty bourgeois[ie]. This is always possible.

Now does this not amount to a breakdown of the necessity? Is there not a real alternative for the proletariat, to have a cut, as it were, in the capitalist enterprise? And is there not a real alternative for the human race as a whole? I quote to you from Lukács, and also a passage from Engels:

"There is always a way out for capitalism. There are capitalistic ways out of the periodic crises, however severe transformation of capitalism will not lead however to peaceful transitions into socialism but, via a long period of crises, civil wars and imperialistic world wars, to the common destruction of the two fighting classes."[xl]

The capitalist way out leads to the destruction of all civilization. Engels: "The transformation of capitalism into socialist society is required if the whole modern society is not to perish. The transformation must be effected under penalty of utter decline."[xli]

In other words, either the proletariat acts in the moment of decision according to the Marxist advice, or else the race commits suicide. The guarantee for the victory of the proletariat is acquired only by the action of the proletariat itself, by living and dying for the revolution. There is an alternative then to communism, but this is not a real alternative, namely, it's only suicide of the human race. In other words, there is no sane alternative. To which I would say this. If there is an alternative, there is a question: Which alternative is sane? And therefore the problem of the end necessarily arises. Why is the preservation of modern civilization good? Why is modern civilization preferable to barbarism? What is meant by barbarism here? These were the questions which were formerly discussed by political philosophy and which are disregarded by Marxism and kindred kinds of philosophy of history. Needless to say, in the moment this question is realized to be a question—that means the "if," if the proletariat acts in a certain way—that means that human folly or egoism or cowardice, or however you might call it, may stop the process. And in the moment you grant this, then I think Marxism is finished, because then you have to moralize; you have to preach. You have to tell people: "Don't be cowards", "Don't be fools," and so on; and therewith the old situation is restored. In other words, the attempt to escape the question of the end or of the fundamental difference between good and bad by delegating this issue[xlii] to the historic process is impossible.

But we can on the other hand also see how this hope to find a solution in history arose. I remind you again of Rousseau. Man must take his bearings by nature, by the nature of man. And this nature of man was thought to be found in the state of nature, in which man had not yet altered his nature by his own effort. And this state of nature proved to be a subhuman state, [the] state of a gorilla, not a human being. Rousseau seems to have thought that gorillas are men in the state of nature.[xliii] Now if the state of nature is a subhuman state, we can't take our bearings by nature.

[xl] Strauss's translation. In the transcript: "however severe [?]" See Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. R. Livingstone, 306.
[xli] We have been unable to identify this passage.
[xlii] In the transcript: "issue (?)"
[xliii] The transcriber notes: "Unintelligible aside."

Where will we find them? The most simple solution, and the most attractive for a number of generations of Western man, was that we can find our bearings only in that process which leads from natural subhuman barbarism to humanity, and that process is the historical process. Now that could of course work only under one condition, namely, if this process has a direction. Then you could say, with some plausibility, that these and these methods of behavior have led into a human direction, have made[20] [us] more than subhuman beings [. . .] go on and on and on.[xliv] But in the moment it proved to be true, and there are many considerations why it proved to be true, that there is no such process [. . .][xlv]

Then one must again go back to the older orientation and find the orientation beyond the process. Today we have, I think, a certain awareness of this difficulty, and the school which is now superseding Marxism on the European continent, Existentialism, is based on this awareness: that this [process] doesn't exist, and there is no historical process to which we can pass the buck, to put it bluntly. There is nothing to which we can delegate our responsibility: there is neither a nature nor history. Whether this is helpful is another question, but it is at least free from the delusion of the simple historicist position which is found in Marx.

Now next time I will try to make some more points and then return to the greatest enemy of Marx, and that was Nietzsche.

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[1] Deleted ", that."
[2] Deleted "that whereas"
[3] Deleted "to."
[4] Deleted "One can, I would like to mention in passing, to show again the connection."
[5] Deleted "resume"
[6] Deleted "in former times, ah,."
[7] Deleted "in."
[8] Deleted "this."
[9] Deleted "that is."
[10] Deleted "that."
[11] Deleted "its."
[12] Deleted "like."
[13] Deleted "An ideology is something—."
[14] Deleted "Has."
[15] Deleted "means."
[16] Deleted "to."
[17] Deleted "and."
[18] Moved "really."
[19] Deleted "of."
[20] Deleted "it."

[xliv] The transcriber notes: "This whole section is very unclear."
[xlv] The transcriber notes: "Unintelligible sentence or two."

Session 14: no date
From Marx to Nietzsche

Leo Strauss: [In progress] —natural right, very far from it—he speaks of it. But in the crucial argument it is irrelevant. There are two stages in this denial of natural right that are important to us. In the first place, the transition from premodern natural right to modern natural right. Now the first stage means simply this, that there are no natural ends of man. The ends which men choose depend fundamentally on their arbitrary will. In very simple language, the end of man was popularly called, and I think is still popularly called, happiness. But in the premodern doctrine that meant an unambiguous meaning of happiness: true happiness. That some people understand different things about happiness was of course always known, that was . . . imaginary happiness. True happiness is always this . . . an important part of true happiness was the exercise of moral virtue. Now in this modern notion it is assumed that happiness doesn't have a specific meaning but differs from individual to individual or from group to group. Still, there is a natural right, because there are certain fundamental laws of man, say, self-preservation, which are natural to man, which give them some guidance. Then we may say that the natural beginnings, the most elementary motivations, point to one and only one social order as the just one. Think of Tom Paine: self-preservation and its indications leads to democracy . . . as the only just social order. In the Lockean doctrine it leads to the sovereign, to a society governed by a sovereign in the Hobbean sense, and only to that. So we have here still one and only one solution to the elementary human and social problem.

The next step was that the natural beginnings do not point to one and only one rational end, the human end. This moment, once this stage was reached, it became impossible to build moral or social doctrine on the nature of man because the nature of man[1] [no longer gave] a sufficient guidance for human action. The most convenient and most acceptable way out was this: beneath the specifically human acts, the specifically human emerges in opposition to nature, through a revolt against nature. Nature therefore is still there, but nature supplies only a negative standard, as it were, from which we have to move away in order to become truly human. Humanity, rationality, means, in the language of Hegel, negativity. It does not mean nihilism; it means negation of nature, or freedom. Now there are of course infinite ways in which man may negate nature. Marx especially found a way to definite guidance on this, and the first point which came up was this. The negation of nature which man effects and through which he becomes a human being is indeed rooted in nature, namely, the satisfaction of natural wants. But the crucial thing is not the satisfaction of natural wants, but that through which the satisfaction of natural wants is possible. And that means productive activity: by productivity the natural wants are transformed into human wants.

But still this connection with the primary wants, food and such things, gives some guidance. And the next and crucial point is that there is an ordered sequence of stages of productivity so man, say, in the most simple conditions can satisfy wants . . . but then they have to think and work for themselves and become producers. Out of their productive activity there emerges a change in

their wants themselves, and so on. And this is an ordered sequence, and this gives some guidance to man now in the following way. We must raise the question of the ends: it is the question of how we ought to live and act. Now this question is according to Marx at every time solved by the historical situation, so then the question doesn't arise because it is answered by the situation. And more precisely, it is every time solved by the historical situation in such a way that the sequence of solutions—say, the hunting society, the feudal society, capitalist society—points to an optimum solution. The optimum solution is the classless society, or the end. The problem of the end is solved by historical necessity, and that means that in each situation there are no alternatives; therefore we don't have to will them. We have in every situation an unsatisfactory situation: in the language of Marx, contradiction; or in subjective terms, a state of unhappiness. Now this unsatisfactory situation and dissatisfaction points away from it, but according to Marx it points in one direction only. There is only one way out. Therefore the understanding of the present situation and its demands takes the place of thinking about the ends. Today I am either a capitalist or a proletarian, or in some dark area between capitalism or proletarianism. This situation shows me [that] if I am a capitalist, I defend the capitalist order. If I am in neither position, I am driven in my aimless way between two alternatives according to the stage of employment and so on.

Fundamentally, philosophy of history takes the place of political philosophy. We have to understand the historical situation as a part of the historical process, and then we know what we have to do. We do know that reflections about the end are unnecessary and insufficient. As Marx himself puts it in his early writing, *German Ideology*, philosophy is replaced by history. The difficulty arises from the fact that there is always an alternative, as Marx and Marxists are forced to admit. But Marxists would say: This alternative is insane, and therefore there are no alternatives, the alternative being the breakdown of civilization or barbarism. Today some of them would say, of course: There is an alternative to communism, but that is a third world war and its implications. Still, we can't help raising the question: Why is barbarism inferior to civilization? And that this is a question which cannot be dismissed is sufficiently shown by Rousseau, who in a way originated this position and whose famous statement about the blissful state of savages . . . I think it is now confirmed by an enormously developed science called anthropology, which shows how wonderful the life of savages—they are no longer called savages—is. So it is really a problem, and Marxism presupposes a dogmatic answer to it and it does not articulate it any more.

But still Marx does give an answer to the end, as we have seen last time. Marx's answer is this: The good life means freedom, but freedom not only in the sense that no man should be dependent on any other man; it means also the full development of all faculties of each. This full freedom presupposes human control of nature and control of that control, meaning control of production by society without any other control of man by man, for that would be insufficient freedom. The administration of things, according to Engels, without the administration of man: the withering away of the state. Now this raises a number of questions. In the first place, is this full development of all the faculties of each a reasonable goal? Is the notion that every man can be a universal being, meaning having a full development of all his faculties regardless of all economic handicaps, [2]is [this] a reasonable thing? Anyone who has ever tried to be competent in any field of human activity knows that it is very hard to be competent in two, to say nothing of all fields of human endeavor. The second point is: Is the administration of things possible

without the government of man? And I think we have seen from a passage I read to you from Lenin's *State and Revolution* that according to Lenin's admission, the administration of things without government of man means lynching, because he does not deny that there are some people who will misbehave in that perfect society.[i] Still, one would say: All right, then we must have courts of law, and that is government of man over man, but just lynching will do. And I think that is a way of admitting the necessity of government, because no reasonable person can leave it at that. And the third point I made is: Is it reasonable to assume that the governors in that universal classless society—because we will need governors after all—will be concerned with the full development of the faculties of each and not rather with bread and movies?[ii] Meaning to satisfy the laboring masses, meaning to give the laboring masses a tolerably high standard of living, if they can conveniently do it, but that's about all. What guarantee do we have? Where is the Marxist guarantee? I think that it exists only as a mere pious hope.

These simple fundamental difficulties of the Marxist position are concealed by the Marxist's discouraging of any discussions of the end. The whole emphasis is put not on the end, the classless society where everyone is a universal man, but on the penultimate end, meaning the stage at which we have only the dictatorship of the proletariat in expectation of that blissful state. Or in other words, the penultimate end is the fight against capitalist imperialism with all its implications. But here the question is inevitable: How can one fight a great evil if one does not know that the alternative is not a greater evil still? I hope that is clear. I mean, if we knew that end were perfect and truly desirable, then that would be one thing; but that would have to be proven, and that would require a long discussion. But to say: "Let's forget about that, that will come in a few centuries; now we are concerned only with abolishing an abomination, the capitalist system, and replacing it by the dictatorship of the proletariat, and all its implications," this is not sufficient. But even granting that the capitalist system is a great evil, how can we know that the alternative is not a greater evil? So we are invited to engage in all sorts of bloodshed and degrading actions for no good reason, which no one can expect us to do.

Now in earlier times it was only possible to compare an unsatisfactory state of capitalist society with a promise. Today we can compare an unsatisfactory state of society with a reality which is not satisfactory, namely, the present Russian Soviet regime. This Marxist evasion of the problem of the end is not merely a tactical device in order to lure us into an impossibility by concealing it from us. It is due to a fundamental difficulty. According to the Marxist doctrine, there is no natural right in any sense; or more generally stated, there is no permanent truth. I read to you a passage on that from the *Communist Manifesto* last time. Why? Because all thought about right and wrong and about everything else reflects the state of productivity in which men are. Either it disguises the state of productivity and then it is an ideology, or else it reveals the state of productivity and its implications [and] then it is Marxism. Now if that is true, then Marxism as a doctrine is as much relative to the present situation as the most atrocious capitalist ideology, only the capitalist ideology deceives us about the present reality and Marx tells us the truth about it. But it is meaningful only for the present. That means that any thoughts of Marx, of any Marxist, about the end are provisional. They are dated, and that means that Marxist doctrine as a whole is

[i] Session 13.

[ii] Politburo archives opened in 2004, for example, show the details of Stalin's great interest in films and their directors.

according to Marxist principles bound to perish—deservedly, because it is related only to a special situation.

I would like to discuss this point briefly with you, because it is of general importance and not only with respect to Marxism. A present-day Marxist writer, Lukács, who is aware of this difficulty, and the only one I know of who is, compares the truth of Marxism to the truth of classical economics or to the truth of the ideology of the French Revolution. Marxism, he implies, is as true today as these doctrines were in their time.[iii] Now what does that mean, "a doctrine is true"? A doctrine is true if it makes intelligible a historical situation in such a manner as to make visible for us, in a manner which we can now understand, the root of our difficulties, and then it shows us the way out of these difficulties. Now both classical economics and the theories of the French Revolution did that for their time. The theorists of the French Revolution, for example, were enabled by their theories to see the badness of the *ancien régime* and the way out. Surely, but were they not according to Marxism utterly mistaken in their view of the new society?

If we apply this criterion of truth to Marx, what would it mean? That Marx would be a perfect analyst of the crisis of capitalist society, but that everything he says about the sequel might be fundamentally wrong. But since he is not merely an analyst but claims to be a guide to the future, he would be wrong in the decisive respect. Marxism may be right—in other words, even if it were right in its judgment of the capitalist system and in its view [of] how the capitalist system can or will be destroyed, namely, by action of the proletariat, but what about the situation where Marxism is wrong in its expectations from the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the theorists of the French Revolution were wrong in their expectations from the French Revolution? Maybe capitalist society would be followed by just another kind of mess and not by the final solution of all contradictions as the Marxist thinks. The prospect of a classless society is an integral part of Marxism. If Marxism is only true for our time, that prospect too is only true for our time. And this truth for our time, meaning the expectation of the classless society, may prove to be the delusion which gave the proletariat the courage to overthrow the capitalist system in order to find itself at the end the slaves of an ironclad military bureaucracy. That would be the inevitable consequence of this point of view.

How can Marx or any Marxist be certain that this vision of the end is valid beyond the critical situation of the disintegration of capitalist society? Marxism may be true now, but untrue later. In fact, that *must* be so, if there are no permanent truths. Just as the prospect held out by the French Revolution proved to be a dream, the so-called realm of freedom may prove to be a dream, too. And its truth may be universal despotism of bureaucrats and technocrats. I quote a passage from Lukács:

"The 'relativization' of truth in Hegel's doctrine meaning that the higher stage is always the truth of the lower stages. In this manner, the objectivity of truth accessible on the lower plane is not destroyed. That is, for example, if a feudal baron has a particular notion, that is not simply nonsense, but is true for him: But when I see it is only true for the baron, I am already on a higher stage, because I see its relativity to the baron, and then there is a new objectivity reached.

[iii] Perhaps "The Changing Function of Historical Materialism," in *History and Class Consciousness*, 225.

That truth, namely the truth of the lower plane, merely reveals a different meaning by being integrated into a more complete or more integrated totality."[iv]

So in Marxism, to come back to the point I made, there is no final truth, but only steady approximation to the actual truth. In other words, all results are provisional. But that means of course that the meaning of the result is subject to radical change. All particular statements made about capitalist society may remain true, but the meaning of them is radically changed, just as the meaning of classical physics is radically changed by relativity, and so on. To maintain itself, Marxism is forced to assert that it belongs to a historical situation which is exempt from the fate of relativity, to an absolute moment. As Lukács puts it: "The proletariat is the first subject in history which is objectively capable of an adequate social consciousness."[v] In this respect, Marxism is itself confronted with this fundamental difficulty: if all truth is historical, then we have to go from either simple relativism, that every truth is relative to our historical situation, or we have to exempt our situation from the historical flux by saying that we live in the absolute moment. Hegel had the courage to do the latter. He said, "I live at the end of history." But Marx ridicules that. He says that the great historical event is still in front of us. But Marx too is forced to assert he thinks the absolute thought; otherwise he cannot claim truth for his doctrine.

One could also illustrate this by the following consideration: the goal is the full development of all faculties, but those faculties are not those which belong to man by nature. That is impossible. These faculties are acquired through the historical process. Now if that is so, how can he know that with the end of this process the faculties will not become atrophied? In other words, we cannot speak of such an end if we do not have an understanding of the nature of man, which is the presupposition of history and not merely the product of history with its infinite possibilities of variation.

One can also state this as follows by taking issue with a view which is by no means limited to Marx but also embodied in Marx. What does Marx understand by nature? It is indicated by the fact that nature appears as the subject of control or of conquest, or being pushed back. Now complete control of nature would be perfect freedom, but one could say than the notion of complete control of nature is absurd. For the question arises: For what purposes should the control be used? Complete control of nature means of course also complete control of human nature. But if human nature is completely controlled, this means that any purposes that man may have are subject to change, and then they are arbitrary; and this seems to show that the idea of complete control of nature is absurd, because it makes impossible knowing an intelligent use of that control. Control of nature makes sense only if there are purposes which are independent of that control or prior to that control: in other words, if there are natural purposes. Of course, in the confused everyday thought that is taken for granted, there are natural purposes, surely. There are food, shelter, and so on, and no problem arises there. But that of course is in no way sufficient, because even the present-day positivists would say that these purposes themselves are socially conditioned, invariably. What is really natural in the desire for food is almost nothing. Some people can live on all levels of calories. What does the desire for food really mean as a guide?

[iv] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 188.
[v] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 199.

I would like to add something about the Marxist conception of nature, but that would be only a number of quotations. Some of them are quite interesting, but before I do that I would like to know whether I made myself understood. The main point is this: that Marxism claims to have triumphed by finding a substitute for natural right in the historical process, and this attempt is impossible.

Student: Remec[vi] wants to know whether the only alternative is the immediate alternative.

LS: They only refer to it as the immediate alternatives. In the French Revolution they did not dream of the classless society in which there would be no private property and social control of the means of production. They simply saw the inequality of the *ancien régime*, the absurdity of hereditary nobility and so on, and they fought it. They had the delusion of getting a liberal parliamentarian democracy, but without knowing it they prepared the classless society. So even the proletarian of today, even the class-conscious proletarian does not have to know that the function of the proletarian is to abolish all classes. It is sufficient for him that he knows that he is a proletarian and that he has to destroy the rule of the bourgeoisie.

Student: Remec asks whether it is true that the end is only in the minds of the theorists, such as Marx and Engels.

LS: Yes, they must know. Because you see, otherwise Marx will be wholly disloyal to himself by ascribing a power to knowledge as knowledge which it can't have. The moving force must be social passion which arises from a social condition. So the basic thing is a certain social condition created by two fundamental factors: (a) the stage of productivity, and (b) the legal-social-political framework. And the fundamental contradiction is the contradiction between these two things. As you know, the famous doctrine that the present stage of productivity cries for a planned economy and so on: it has outgrown the anarchistic atomistic stage of the state of affairs in the competitive system. Full awareness of the end is not needed; what is needed for the fighter is full awareness of the penultimate end, the dictatorship of the proletariat.[vii]

. . . the class consciousness of the bourgeoisie, but the question arises, can not the possibility at least . . . logical evidence in it . . .

Furthermore, one could raise this question [. . .] disregarding the more sophisticated question: Does an analysis of history or economics—social, intellectual, religious history—really justify[viii] the Marxists? That is the way in which the discussion is usually conducted, you know, that you simply take so-called [. . .] of history, and you can't understand the historical facts that way. Can you understand, say, Plato's doctrine or Hobbes's doctrine in terms of social and economic history? I believe that it could be shown that this is impossible. But I thought that it was more fruitful to discern the more fundamental problems.

[vi] Possibly Peter Pavel Remec (1925-2020), who was a doctoral student in international relations at the University of Chicago in the postwar period. He was a long-time member of the political science department at Fordham University.

[vii] The remainder of this session is provided by a portion of the transcript marked "14B."

[viii] In the transcript: "(justify?)"

In Europe, especially in France, there is no fight on this ground. You see, the more sophisticated French Marxists and another school, Existentialism—these are aware of this difficulty, that there is a difficulty created by the fact that history, the historical process is unfinished and unfinishable. You see, the fundamental problem is this: If all truth is related to the historical process, belongs to that, there cannot be *final* truth. You see, true guidance for man is possible[ix] only if the process comes to an end. That was the Hegelian position. But if the historical process is going on and is permanently unfinishable, then every doctrine is perishable, meaning that it belongs to a particular time and is wrong beyond its time. When you read Lukács's criticism of existentialism, you will see that what strikes you is that Lukács completely . . . to understand the existentialist counterassertion. Now you know that I have nothing to do with existentialism . . . but you must say that at this point it has an awareness of a difficulty which Marxism does not have. I wish that I could explain it to you. Could you explain your difficulty?

Student: The question which I put? I said that you could reduce Marxism to simple relativity.

LS: No, I noted the difficulty inherent in Marxism. It attempts to give a final doctrine.

Same student: No, I don't think he claims to give a final doctrine.

LS: Then it is hopeless. Because you see, if you [. . .] all kinds of inconveniences in secondary things, but if we are asked to risk *everything*, we must insist on finality in this point. So in other words, if we are asked to destroy as far as we can the capitalist system in order to get the dictatorship of the proletariat established, that is in itself not a meaningful proposition. It becomes meaningful only if we know that the dictatorship of the proletariat is an ultimate end leading up to the classless society, which satisfies all reasonable human demands. Now what are these reasonable human demands? Marx says [. . .][x] He makes final assertions concerning the most important points. Now how can the question be settled? [3xi] How does Marx *know* that . . . we are speaking now of the historical process: How does he know that is the end? If that is not final, if that is not also permanent, we fight and ruin ourselves in order to achieve something transitory,[xii] because this end might prove to be not more than a reflex of a certain kind of bourgeois morality. And this notion might in the end be a complete state of boredom[xiii] to the worker in this Marxist "utopia," working four hours a day and being bored for eight hours a day, and being controlled only by an enormously strong pathology.[xiv] That could be. Marxism cannot guarantee that.

And I think that is connected with the fact that Marx's superficial treatment of this matter is due to the assertion that there are no permanent truths, certainly not regarding morality. And what he says in the *Communist Manifesto* in the paragraph I read to you makes this quite clear, takes up this complexity which everyone would raise.[xv] . . . Look, if all moral ideas are so related to class

[ix] In the transcript: "(is possible)?"
[x] In the transcript: "(we see?)," followed by a lengthy blank space.
[xi] In the transcript: "(settled?) [is inevitable]."
[xii] In the transcript, "in order to . . . (to achieve something transitory)"
[xiii] In the transcript: "(state of boredom?)"
[xiv] In the transcript: "(pathology?)"
[xv] In the transcript: "(raise)?"

and society, how does it come [about] that Confucius, Socrates, and goodness knows what others say in certain respects really the same thing? And Marx does *not* say that there is a certain kind of hard core of justice of which men have always been aware—no, he says that they all live in class-ridden societies and this fact explains why there is an agreement throughout history. But if this agreement regarding justice which existed up to now is relative to class-ridden society, what then can we expect of the classless society[xvi] that we know nothing about? And how can reasonable men be expected to sacrifice everything for something absolutely undefined, or at best negatively defined, [as] the successor to capitalist society? That would however require for reasonable men some show of proof that capitalist society is so indescribably bad and past repair, and past improvements, that any solution, any alternative, is preferable. And such a proof cannot be given.

Student: But here I should like to ask you, what idea did humanity have before . . . Why did they sacrifice? Why was the French Revolution based . . . to form a ruler . . . government. Did they have any idea of the values which they were going to create?

LS: No, they believed[4] [they knew] very well what they wanted. And you only have to read, for example, Thomas Paine, who gives you an answer: a society without hereditary nobility, and of course without monarchy, and with a minimum of state power. This is sketched in *The Rights of Man*. That is the *good* society where all men can be happy, or as happy as human conditions allow, at least. And therefore . . . will be destroyed. I see no problem. What is the difficulty here? I mean, the question is whether Paine or Condorcet have a certain notion of the good society for the sake of which they destroyed the established society. Now this notion of a good society which Paine and Condorcet had is not the right notion—is this what you imply?

Student: No, you said why should men sacrifice, from the Marxist position [. . .] of our society when we do not know actually the [. . .]

LS: They knew what kind of [. . .] This question is whether men like Paine and Condorcet, however unsatisfactory they may be for other reasons, devoted considerable time and effort to tell people what they were fighting for. And fighting for [. . .] not only in terms of immediate needs against this oppressor, but something which is in itself [. . .] In other words, not only is the content of the Marxist doctrine of the end different from the earlier ones, but the *mode* is different. The emphasis in Marx is not on the *end* for the sake of which is postulated in the Marxist doctrine, but on the immediately demanded action, what I call the penultimate end. I am sure that you have some real difficulties . . .[xvii]

I believe that the evidence of the Marxist contentions has of course varied from decade to decade depending on the conditions of capitalist society; that's clear. And that looks very different in different countries, but I think that the fundamental difficulty remains the same.

Mr. Gildin: What relation does . . . the Marxist denial of the whole moral finality with the assumption that all human evils stem from economic conditions? Is there any relationship

[xvi] In the transcript: "(the classless society?)."
[xvii] The transcript has a row of asterisks here.

here?[xviii] Do they say that morality is the regulation of the evil that results from economic conditions; therefore all morality is relative [. . .] economic conditions and can be eliminated?

LS: Yes, but the question is not so easy to answer because of the many statements of Marx and the Marxists about the meaningless of the moral distinctions. You know? But if we disregard them I think it is fundamentally the Rousseauean scheme. Man is the being who is primarily concerned with satisfying primary wants. Looking at that, there is no reason whatever why a human being should want to oppress or exploit another human being. But then we look more closely and see how indifferently man can satisfy his wants without social organization of some kind. But in the moment you have social organization of some complexity, you have already social stratification, classes, and oppression of one class by another. This is bad, but why is this morally bad or unjust? I believe that this is ultimately irrelevant for the Marxist argument. The real development is this: that these arrangements, with their harshness and cruelties and so forth, break down because of the progress of technological change. You can say it that simply [. . .] Well, slavery is bad, unjust. What do you mean? Slavery was very good in Greece; all of the wonderful things which Greece produced were based or produced on slavery, so [. . .] there is nothing which can be said against that. But then this Greek slave economy broke down. You know? Then we skip a number of stages and we arrive at the modern free wage labor economy. This economy is—and this technology is—absolutely superior to anything else, and the question of goodness or badness doesn't arise. But Western technology will simply sweep everything away, away from the face of the earth.

Now we look at this society: this society, the capitalist liberal democratic society, is *claimed* to be the last word. To which Marx says: No. There is a considerable part of that society either *within*, according to the original Marxists, or *without*, according to present-day Marxists, which is worse off than before. Worse off. But let us try to understand this [not] in a moral sense,[xix] simply to say people most dissatisfied, most unhappy, deprived of all religious consolation by the progress of science; and therefore bent on happiness on this earth, and therefore in a state of revolt. This cannot go on forever. It has the germs of its own breakup within itself. Now then we look around, and we see that the out class[xx] of a society in which this conflict [brews and] which we know now will [eventually] be abolished and there will be a perfectly harmonious society—it will be classless and so on and so on. I think that one can construct this without a single moral term in the Marxist outlook, but of course they used such moral terms as oppression, exploitation, and so on, and this is naturally a part of their propaganda. But it could also be construed as follows (I don't remember that this was ever done): Since all states of society, social conditions, are reflected in certain moral ideas, it might be possible to make a dialectics of justice leading from the most primitive notions of justice, which simply means to comply with custom, to that notion of justice of which Marx thought it would be the final one: "From everyone according to means, to everyone according to his needs."[xxi] But what happened, I think, was this, that in Marx himself—he was the heir of a tradition at least from Rousseau to Hegel,

[xviii] In the transcript: "(any relationship here?)."
[xix] The transcript reads here "in a moral sense," but Strauss apparently means the contrary.
[xx] In the transcript: "(out class?)"
[xxi] See "Critique of the Gotha Program," a letter Marx wrote in 1875 to the leaders of the Eisenach faction of the German Social Democratic movement. The letter was published in *Neue Zeit* in 1891. The title was provided by Engels. *The Marx-Engels Reader,* 531.

and in which the fundamental moral concepts which he uses are imported,[xxii] and his crude statements . . . to be replaced by history. What does this mean? Among other things, it means of course[5] that ethics is meaningless. I know that they have now in Soviet Russia chairs for logic, ethics, and all this kind of thing, but I don't know how they reconcile that with the Marxist notions. But . . . well, I simply don't know.

Mr. Gildin: I'm trying to get at what [. . .] I should think that one of them would be that Marx laid down assertions about what should *not* be, but not giving a notion of what should be. No demonstration that it will be.

LS: Well, there is this: he had a vague notion of what should be and would be, and that was the classless society of the universal men.

Mr. Gildin: But was that not merely a negative notion,[xxiii] though?

LS: Well, that is the way in which it is frequently presented by Marxists who like to evade the question of the end. They say: Well, we cannot possibly say anything definite about the final state.

Mr. Gildin: Well, this procedure is justified to some extent by what Marx himself did.

LS: Yes. Well, Marx was not, of course, a philosopher, to put it very simply. One can show the fundamental difficulty of the Marxist position, and not only of the Marxist position but perhaps most visibly of the Marxist position, as follows. There is a remark which occurs especially in Engels very frequently about the end. There are two ends: one end is classless society, surely, but the other is the end of human life on earth. And that is of some importance, because you know in all religious notions of the millennium there is some still more glorious end, one could say, beyond the millennium: the reabsorption of things into the Creator. But here in Marx we have this different situation. The question is this. In other words, conquest of nature [can] never[6] go so far—that is admitted by this distinction, that man can never guarantee the conditions of his own perpetuity. Now Engels brings up this question, [and] he has only this remarkable answer: That is far off. That is far off. In other words, we are still on the ascending scale—that is what he said—and let us not worry about that.

But I think that we have to worry about that, because the very notion of man's guaranteeing the conditions of his perfection of this perfect society stands and falls with that. That is, as it were, the revenge of nature, the revenge of natural right for its denial. The notion of the control of nature is simply a metaphoric expression which means only that man has now a greater power than he had in the past. True control of nature is impossible, if there is an end of the world. In theological language, one could say that the whole position is based on a simple oblivion of eternity. I mean, that is simply forgotten. The so-called "discovery of history" and of the historical process is only another expression for the forgetting of the truly permanent, which is not susceptible to change, especially not to human charge. One could even say that this—well, we shall try to discuss in the next two meetings the position of Nietzsche, which—well,

[xxii] In the transcript: "(imported?)"
[xxiii] In the transcript: "(notion?)"

Nietzsche does not take issue with Marxism in particular, but with socialism and communism in general; and not only does he reject them, these positions, and therefore [this] has certain very great political consequences, but Nietzsche's greater importance consists in the fact that he was the first to face the problem created by historical relativism, as it is now called. Marx did not face it because of his acceptance of the unsupported belief in progress. In other words, Marx was absolutely certain that the historical process is in principle a progressive process. But if this is so, we can always be certain that what we think and regard as right and good is certainly superior to any alternative known to us. But in the moment that becomes questionable—in other words, in the moment the question [is confronted] of how do you know that is necessarily so, in that moment historical relativity proper ends.[xxiv] And then we have no guidance whatsoever. Nietzsche was, I think, the first thinker who faced this problem. I will turn to that next time.

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[1] Deleted "did not give any more."
[2] Moved "this."
[3] Deleted "[is inevitable]."
[4] Deleted "to know."
[5] Deleted "is."
[6] Moved "can."

[xxiv] In the transcript: "(ends?)"

Session 15: March 1, 1954
Nietzsche contra Marx

Leo Strauss: In order to obviate the difficulties into which we ran last time, I would like to repeat certain points I made, and maybe it will be better understood today. In understanding Marx's doctrine, it is indispensable to look back to Rousseau, as I have said a few times. In Rousseau, the just society is democracy, a form of association in which everyone is free because he is equal to everyone else. That he is free means in Rousseau not more than to be free from personal dependence. Freedom in society is incompatible with complete independence; therefore freedom in society can mean not more than dependence only on the law, on the impersonal will of an egalitarian society. Then you are not dependent on any person, and yet you have fulfilled the minimum requirement of dependence without which society would be impossible. Now this solution of the problem of freedom requires that everyone be completely dependent on the will of society, because if there is something exempted from social control, that *x* can become a cluster around which personal power is built up and therewith personal dependence. For the sake of freedom, complete alienation of everyone to society is needed. Complete collectivization of each is the condition of the freedom of each. What are the limits of this collectivization in Rousseau? Answer: Private property is accepted as indispensable. Private property, however, is in Rousseau a social institution; it is not a natural right. Private property is necessary. But, as Rousseau emphasizes, private property, the institution of private property is based on a fundamental usurpation, namely, on the original conspiracy of the "haves" against the "have-nots." The state was created by the rich for sanctifying that original usurpation. The state is therefore inevitable because property is inevitable, but it is still a form of unfreedom, of bondage. True freedom is possible in society only at the fringes of society: the bohemians, the artists. That is the only locus of freedom once man has left the state of nature.

I think [that] if you look at Rousseau's position as now sketched, you see already Marx. Marx would say: True freedom for all requires the abolition of private property. When you do not have this kind of bondage and you do not need as a refuge these marginal dark characters, the bohemians and artists, but you have them all around society—in other words, true freedom requires the classless communist society. And Marx would say (I don't recall that he does say) that Rousseau's contradiction—namely, the contradiction that this allegedly free society, democracy, is only a form of bondage nevertheless, if the best form of bondage—reflects the contradiction of capitalist society. To which Rousseau would make this objection: Marx's solution is based on a radical equality which is impossible; because according to Rousseau civilization means necessarily and essentially the development of inequalities, especially of intellectual inequalities. The notion that all men can develop all their faculties contradicts the very conditions of civilization. In other words, Marx's solution is absolutely utopian, and Rousseau's solution, while inelegant, is the best you can have.

One can see by understanding Rousseau's position how Marx could develop the doctrine, and one can see the difficulties which Rousseau presupposed. But that is by no means the whole story. There is another aspect of the problem to which I will return now and which created the difficulty last time. In Rousseau, and on the way from Rousseau to Marx, not only the substance of the social teaching changed—namely, from a democratic, property-owning society to the

classless communist society—likewise, the basis of the social teaching changed. In other words, Marx's teaching has as a teaching a different character from the teaching of Rousseau. Not only the contents but the modes differ. I will explain this first in general terms, and then we will come back to the issue between Rousseau and Marx.

I remind you of the simple fundamental issue with which one is concerned whenever one speaks of natural right. Natural right presupposes, obviously, that there is such a thing as nature, but in a specific sense, namely, that there are natures: the nature of a horse, the nature of a cat, the nature of a dog, and last but not least, the nature of man. Now if there is no nature of man, natural right is of course of no importance. Now what happened in the last generation was that the notion of a nature of man became questionable. We can state the view which is now predominant as follows: There is no nature of man to speak of. Man is infinitely malleable. In other words, if we can speak of a nature of man, it means simply that nature is of infinite malleability. All morally significant characters of man, meaning not digestion and such things, are historical. In other words, in this modern thought, history takes the place formerly occupied by nature.

Now history can be understood in various ways. For example, it is perfectly sufficient to understand it in terms of evolution: Man has evolved and is evolving; there is nothing fixed about the nature of man. And this doctrine is of course much older than evolutionism proper, not only of Darwin, but also Lamarck [and] Rousseau's older contemporary, Diderot, the first man who sketched the principle of evolution of the species, and Rousseau knew that. Now history replaces nature because there is no nature to speak of. It is implied here that history offers a better guide than nature ever could, even if there were such a thing. The argument simply is this. Nature, the nature of man, that is an empty concept. The natural right or natural law tradition was meant to be a law which reason as reason discerns. And the argument was that if reason tries to establish principles of right or justice, it will not go beyond tautologies. For example: "Be good!" This doesn't tell us anything, because we want to know what is good and that is not supplied by reason. Or if reason does arrive at specific formulations which are meaningful, then they are not tenable; they are too narrow. For example, if reason would dictate "Thou shalt not lie" and lying is simply bad, we can easily find cases where we all would admit that lying in this particular case and under these circumstances was good and just: the physician and his patient, parent and children, maybe even governments and governed. But let us leave this out. Or take the prohibition against killing. Of course that is not universally valid. And if you try to make a distinction between murder, which is unjust killing, and just killing, you can't draw a very clear line between them for a number of reasons, or you are forced into a kind of casuistry which is never good enough to cover all cases. So nature and reason are said to be inept guides for acting and living men, whereas history is said to be a good guide because in the historical situation these fundamental principles of action are already defined by the particular society and by the particular situation in which people live. And history thus understood is said not only to be a better guide than reason, but a sufficient guide. The Marxist doctrine is one particularly successful form of this historical substitution for natural right.

Now let us return for a moment to Rousseau to see how this difficulty arose. Rousseau still said: The just society must have its roots in nature, in what is by nature right. And he found in the first place that by nature all men are created equal, and that is bound to have infinite consequences. Nature means, however, in Rousseau: in the state of nature. If this state of nature is subhuman,

[a] state of gorillas, natural freedom and equality are also subhuman. In other words, natural freedom and equality are necessarily depreciated. Human freedom and equality must be something entirely different from natural freedom and equality. Human freedom and equality are, even as goals of aspiration, not a gift of nature, but in the first place the work of reason. Reason finds out somehow that without freedom and equality man cannot [. . .]

I don't want to go into the other aspects of Rousseau. I turn immediately to Marx now. Marx says this. To the extent to which the goals called human freedom and equality are the work of reason and only of reason, there is no guarantee whatever that they are more than pious wishes. To be more than just pious wishes, freedom and equality, even as goals, must be the product of history. The fact that man now understands his freedom and equality as these goals is the proof that human freedom and equality are now practicable and not merely pious wishes. The principle is: Mankind does not set itself any tasks which it cannot achieve. And therefore mankind will not set itself any task before the time has come at which it can be achieved. We of course would raise the question: Why are freedom and equality as Marx understands them the goals now? The answer: They alone show the only way out of the present predicament. They are the only alternatives, in present-day language, to atomic destruction.

Now the argument can be developed more fully by taking into consideration the whole present political and social scene. This whole argument is today absolutely unconvincing. If I limit myself to the atomic destruction or the third world war business, the Soviet Union is at least as responsible for the unleashing of the Second World War as the liberal democracies were. More than that, and going beyond this political argument in the narrow sense of the term, even if we would grant that the classless communist society with alleged perfect freedom and equality—even if it were true that the classless society is *the* way out of the atomic predicament, it could still be a nightmare. Is this not obvious, that we have come to such an impasse that we have to swallow something absolutely terrible, a permanent prison and whatnot, because the alternative, complete destruction of the human race, would be still worse? In other words, the analysis of the present situation leading up to the prospect of the classless society by a dictatorship of the proletariat does in no way guarantee that this end is desirable in itself. It merely would be the best you can have now. Yet this classless society is said to be not a nightmare, a tiny bit better than atomic destruction, but the realm of freedom. How do we know that? Of course on the basis of the general Marxist philosophy of history, which shows a kind of tendency toward that classless society. And so we are certain: what is coming is not a perpetual nightmare but eventually the realm of freedom. I would state this point, partly referring to what I have said in the last meeting: There is no historical necessity which can dispense us from raising the question whether the so-called end of the historical process is good or bad, or whether it is *the* end worthy of human efforts. It may be that nature is no guide. History certainly is not a guide. History cannot take the place which was formerly believed to be occupied by nature.

Returning again to the general theme, natural right presupposes nature in the sense indicated: something permanent, not subject to human control. How does Marx understand nature? Marx says: "Hitherto the philosophers have attempted to interpret the world, but what matters is that the world be changed."[i] This is in one of his theses on Feuerbach—I think that is available in

[i] Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 145.

English.[ii] To repeat: Not interpreting the world, not understanding the world, but changing the world. Now when Marx makes this remark, he thinks of course primarily of changing the social world by social revolution, but he thinks naturally also of the world simply. Control of nature, not only of the means of production, is the condition of freedom, of that final freedom and equality. Without such control of nature, as Engels says, religion is inevitable. In other words, if man does not control nature in fact, he will try to control it by illusory means—magic and religion. Prayers, for example, would be a kind of controlling what you can't control by machines. Yet, if we take this seriously for one moment, and I think we must, control of nature is impossible for the very simple reason, as Engels admits, that this controlling being, man, will perish sooner or later. There is something which cannot be controlled: there is something which can only be seen, interpreted, contemplated or whatnot, but not controlled. And therefore an ultimate despair regarding human things, namely, insofar as the greatest effort, all the efforts of the human race in millions of years culminate in that communist society, and this will perish again. Ultimate despair is absolutely legitimate. And now to turn it around, religion is legitimate. The Marxists are unable to answer this difficulty. A further consideration: Control of the world means control of man, control of human purposes. But if all human purposes are subject to control, control itself becomes meaningless. We do not know for what cause or what purpose we want control. That is today visible, I think, in the general discussion [in] our social science as it has developed: all science gives us means of control, power. And our science, our reason, is admittedly unable today to tell us for what purposes this power should be used.

The last point I would like to make, and that was the one where we had those difficulties: Marx denies the permanent. History. And all human thought, all human aspirations, are historical. Is not the end, as [it is] guiding present-day communism—allegedly the classless communist society—relative to this present situation, destined therefore to be thrown into the dustbin of history at the next corner? To which criticism the objection was made that Marxism, especially through the mouth of Lenin, admits absolute eternal truth. What does that mean? There is a kind of progress of knowledge, an accumulative process. For example, at a certain moment Galileo discovered laws of the [free] fall, Newton discovered further laws—Darwin also, and Marx too, etc.—and this knowledge is final, permanent, and in this sense eternal. The question is whether that is a sufficient interpretation of [the] Marxist understanding of knowledge. We have only to raise this question: Who is the subject of this eternal permanent knowledge? The eternal object would seem to require an eternal subject. Who is that? Who is the knower of these verities of Galileo and Newton, Darwin, Lysenko,[iii] etc.? Answer—there can be only one answer: Man, man as man. Yet we know also from Marx that this is insufficient, because there is at least a dimension of objects which is not equally accessible to man as man, or not equally accessible to all men but only to qualified man. We know, for example, that the Marxist doctrine of history is relative to, related to the proletariat. Certainly Marx does not mean that it is merely relative, but that means that only the proletarian consciousness has the ability to grasp the present situation, the past and the future as far as it is relevant here. Certain eternal truths become visible only from the point of view of the proletarian. Only the proletarian can see the whole historical process and therewith the general character of the end stage. And it is this part of the argument with which I am alone concerned.

[ii] Presumably Strauss's translation. Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach" (written in 1845; published in 1888 by Engels). See *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 143-200.

[iii] On Lysenko, see session 13, n. xxv.

I would raise this question. History is not finished. The proletarian consciousness itself is changing. The proletarian consciousness of 1954 is certainly different from that of 1848. This very fact, that history is not finished, that the proletarian consciousness itself is changing, implies the possibility that the Marxist understanding of the end, and therewith of the process leading up to the end, may very well be changed. I would like to state the difficulty in the following form. Either all important truths are in principle always knowable to man, [and] then history is merely accidental. That was the older view, the pre-Hegelian view. And that is of course rejected by Marx, so we have then to say [that] all important truths are not always knowable. Again a distinction: Either they are known now (that means the end of history, Hegel), which is rejected by Marx; or they are not known now. I am not speaking of uninteresting truths, but I am speaking only of the important truths. If not all important truths are known now, a hopeless difficulty arises. That certain important truths—say, Darwin, Lysenko, etc.—are known today doesn't help us very much, because if other important truths are not known now, the truths known now will change their meaning in the future. The significance of every scientific discovery consists not merely in the addition of the new finding to seventy-five other findings, but if it is really an important discovery, it changes the meaning of everything known before. In other words, if history is not at the end, there is a possibility of future surprises; and one surprise might very well be that the classless society of the end might prove to be the greatest and the most lasting jail which man ever built. If all important truths are not known today, and if history is the real vehicle of the discovery of truth, relativism seems to be an inevitable consequence. To mention this point again: the classless communist society might be the end of history. That might remain true. But a new discovery is made: this society is not the highest stage of human knowledge, but just an end stage of fossilization and decay. In other words, the Marxist notion of an end stage might be perfectly true, and yet the judgment on that [stage] might very well[1] not [be] that of Marx—everyone activating all his faculties; painting, hunting, you remember—it might very well be what Nietzsche said about the last man. There is no Marxist way out of this predicament, it seems to me.

With these remarks, I would like to turn to Nietzsche, Nietzsche simply being the greatest thinker, however impossible and insane he may be, who opposed Marxism, communism in every form. Now Nietzsche has of course a common ground with Marx, and that is history. On this basis he opposes Marx, and he develops a political and moral doctrine which is opposed to Marx's. We shall have to sketch this doctrine, but in doing so we must not lose sight of that other problem. Does Nietzsche's opposition to Marx, his substantive opposition to Marx, affect the understanding of history? Do you see the relation of these two problems? In prehistorical times, say, in classical antiquity, all discussions took place on the common ground of human nature. In the nineteenth century and up to the present day, the typical discussions have also a common basis: no longer nature but history. But the question is of course also in each case: Is it really the same conception of nature—or in the modern case, the same conception of history—which is underlying the doctrine?

First, I will try to give an introduction to Nietzsche in the most simple manner. Nietzsche's starting point was, just as in Marx, the disappointment caused by the French Revolution. That is everywhere in the nineteenth century. But whereas Marx was primarily repelled by the fate of the industrial workers in democratic society, especially in England, Nietzsche was much more

concerned with the decay of culture in Germany. The phenomenon which Tocqueville had described in such detail and which we may simply describe by saying the new vulgarianism—I mean, human wickedness, human stupidity, and crime played a very great role at every time, of course, but in earlier societies and especially in the society immediately preceding the nineteenth century there was a very high culture of taste in spite of all moral corruption. Not much noise, *la bienséance*, etc.—these were the things which were cultivated. And of course that meant also high demands on perfection, quality, not only regarding shoes and clothes but also furniture, buildings, etc. This problem, about which an infinite number of books and articles have been written, the complete decay of taste in the nineteenth century: the rule of the mass, and of the newspaper, the noise and restlessness of modern democracy, and that at the cost of the decline of taste. Nietzsche did not believe that one could take one's refuge in political reaction, because the greatest conservative statesman in Germany, Bismarck, was himself compelled to adopt universal suffrage . . . [iv]

Now there was however a third force between reaction and progress in Europe, and this force is politically nonexistent but nevertheless very important. This was generally known by the name Romanticism. What does this mean, in Germany especially, but I think you would find it also, if not in so clear a form, in the Western countries. Romanticism is based on the disappointment with the French Revolution. That is elementary. This world of freedom and greatness has not come which was promised, but what came was a world of ugliness and stupidity: the big-mouthed, tasteless bourgeois, that was the term they used. But this vulgarity has won, and the victory cannot be questioned. So what remains? Nothing but longing for the past. Only longing for something irrevocably lost is possible now. There is no future.

The greatest document of this sentiment of which I know is a novel, which in the textbooks is called the beginning of realism in the novel: that is Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. The crucial point is this. There is a scene which tells everything. Madame Bovary has a positive spirit, as Flaubert says, meaning sober, not believing any more, not a believing woman, but thoroughly dissatisfied with the prose and vulgarity of the life which she and everyone around her leads. Longing; and this longing leads to the most terrible degradation, ending in suicide. Then she is dead, [having] poisoned herself, and when she is lying in her coffin, two men are sitting in the room. One is a Catholic priest and the other is a French pharmacist, a notable of the Revolution, believing in Voltaire, the French Revolution, etc. And they have a passionate discussion, the one standing up for the old order, Catholicism, and the other for the new order, reason, enlightenment, progress. And when you read these few pages you see—Emma doesn't have to say a word. She refutes by her life and death and misery these two noisy talkers. That was what Flaubert wanted to convey. Now in order to make his meaning quite clear, he wrote another novel, also about a woman—not as well done, I believe—*Salammbo*. Salammbo is the sister of Hannibal and the daughter of Hamilcar—the most heroic atmosphere you can imagine. She also ends by suicide, but here we have a heroic [. . .] compared with the philistine [. . .] of nineteenth-century France. One doesn't have to say more about it. So what is possible then? To live and die like Madame Bovary. But what does this mean, in simple language? To write beautiful sentences. Art for art's sake. Aestheticism, as it became called. That is the only way out—very bad, but the only nobility possible now. Now that was one great European background of Nietzsche.

[iv] Ellipses in original. It is likely that the tape was changed at this point.

In the academic world, in which such things are not tolerated, something similar has happened without the professors being fully aware of it, namely, also an irrevocable past, which was known to be irrevocable and cultivated but without heartburning. And that was this, at least in the German universities: philosophy had become replaced by history of philosophy, meaning also that these professors, drinking beer and smoking pipes, and reading Hegel, as someone said, did in a way what Madame Bovary did, only they did not end by suicide. Also an irrevocable past, the great philosophic geniuses: What can you do? Just cultivate their memories. Nietzsche saw only one philosopher, and that was a man who is now reasonably forgotten (by "reasonably" I mean already forgotten): Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer coined a word, "pessimism." What does that mean? It is of course opposed to optimism. Optimism was the view that this world is the best of all possible worlds, a perfectly defensible contention, but which is now used loosely in the sense of being hopeful. Now Schopenhauer opposed this view and all its implications and presuppositions. According to Schopenhauer, the whole philosophic and religious tradition, at least the preponderant tradition of the West, is optimistic because of the belief either in God, in a creating God, or in reason. And pessimism means, of course, literally: This world is the worst of all possible worlds. Schopenhauer opposed the optimism of the philosophic tradition and in particular also naturally the social optimism of modern times. Optimism means especially, but not exclusively, theism—including this pantheism which was very popular in the world in the nineteenth century, which simply means there is no personal God but the whole is divine. Schopenhauer says that pantheism simply is shamefaced atheism, and he simply accepted atheism. Now atheism is of course much older than Schopenhauer—I remind you of Feuerbach and Marx, to say nothing of earlier men—but Schopenhauer is for one reason of great importance for Nietzsche and for the later European development. Schopenhauer was the first open atheist, as far as I know, of the political right. The earlier outspoken atheists were adherents of the progressive movement. Abolition of belief in God was thought to be a condition of freedom, whereas Schopenhauer says the abolition of the theistic delusion leads to unqualified pessimism, and this unqualified pessimism is indeed the true situation of man. In present-day existentialism there seems to me to be a kind of resurgence of Schopenhauer, in a modified form, of course.

Now this doctrine of Schopenhauer was accompanied by a moral teaching. What is morality according to Schopenhauer? Answer: Compassion. I think you can understand the connection between such a profound pessimism, meaning suffering is the fundamental character of human life, and fellow suffering, that is, compassion. I hope it is also clear that there is a connection between this romanticism as exemplified by Flaubert and the pessimism of Schopenhauer. Where does Nietzsche come in? Now Nietzsche started his career as a classical scholar, as an historian, and that was from the outset the difference between him and Schopenhauer: that Schopenhauer, as Nietzsche put it, lacked historical sense. Schopenhauer, in other words, did not see the connection between his pessimistic philosophy and the time at which this philosophy was propounded. Schopenhauer's pessimism is then for Nietzsche from the outset true, yes, but not because it is *the* truth but only because it is the truth of our time. To make this observation, Nietzsche had to have transcended his time; he had to be beyond his time. He was this by the very fact that he was a classical scholar. He attacked especially Schopenhauer's morality of compassion. Nietzsche said, not only against Schopenhauer but against Marx and everyone else, that atheism means rejection of biblical faith, but meant in all cases rejection of biblical faith plus acceptance of biblical morality. That's Nietzsche's assertion. Whereas Nietzsche's crucial

contention is that if the biblical faith must be rejected, biblical morality must go, too. As regards Marx, you will say: Did Marx not reject biblical morality? Certainly, but from Nietzsche's point of view all communism and socialism is based on some fundamental notion of social justice, or however you might call it in the vulgar sense of the term, which is the biblical heritage.

Now what is that biblical morality? I shall explain this more fully later. Nietzsche makes a fundamental distinction between two types of morality, between slaves' and masters' morality. According to him the biblical morality is the most developed form of slave morality. And Nietzsche adopts the masters' morality, the principle being: One cannot abandon exploitation (a favorite Marxist term) without abandoning life itself. For life is, as Nietzsche put it, will to power, which means always will to overpower other human beings. If you destroy that, you destroy life. Nietzsche calls this attitude "virile": his atheism and pessimism claim to be virile atheism and virile pessimism, against the tired pessimism of Schopenhauer and against the sentimental atheism of the socialists and communists. That implied also the following. There is a human future; there is not merely the end in the way in which Flaubert or Hegel saw it. There is a human future—in that sense, hope—but this is not guaranteed by God or history but depends entirely on man's will, in no way on extraneous support. This pessimism of the nineteenth century was seen by Nietzsche in historical perspective, and he described it as part of a movement necessarily culminating in nihilism. And according to his analysis this pessimism and the later nihilism are a necessary consequence of Christianity, if not even of Platonism, but the chief point he made concerned Christianity. Christianity, or the Bible in general, set up transcendent values, values transcending life, otherworldly values, values in conflict with this life on earth. This is of course a very old story implied in Marx, Feuerbach, etc. It leads therefore to a devaluation of this life: this life is measured in terms of another life. Now in the moment these values are devaluated, no value remains because all this-worldly values were devaluated by Christianity, and after the over-worldly values are devaluated by modern rationalism nothing remains. That is the primary meaning of nihilism.

I will try to link this up with the political teaching. Nietzsche's political philosophy finds its place within this age-old conflict renewed in the French Revolution between aristocracy and democracy. The specific character of Nietzsche's teaching—of his political teaching, of which these things mentioned are the background—is the preparation of the [2][growth] or revolutionary emergence of the new aristocracy against the established democracy. Nietzsche's critique of democracy is, as far as it is developed, in substance identical with Tocqueville's, only Tocqueville, as we know, sided with democracy in spite of his reservations: providence has decided in favor of democracy, and the alternative now is democracy or despotism. Those who are in favor of freedom are now forced to identify themselves with democracy. Nietzsche is less concerned with political freedom than with human greatness, and he sees possibilities of human greatness in the nineteenth century which transcend everything possible in the past, in a new type of tyrants, in a new ruling class which would no longer be national, German or French, but European. In other words, the future toward which Nietzsche looked was global control by a new European ruling class of a military character. No restoration of the old aristocracy, because Nietzsche accepts the radical break with the past. And the most ruthless expression of that break is contained in the word atheism. He rejects the left, including socialism and communism, as crypto-Christian. By these things he prepares fascism, without any shadow of doubt.

Let us reflect for a moment too on what is common to Marx and Nietzsche. First, the atheism, the explicit and militant atheism which implies a fundamentally revolutionary break with institutions and habits of the past. We could also say the extremism. Nietzsche uses that very revealing phrase: "the magic of the extreme."[v] He knew that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the extreme as extreme will exert a power and a charm which it could not have exercised in any previous age. And the empirical proof of the theory is overwhelming. The second point which they have in common—Marx and Nietzsche—from atheism is global politics. Small politics, national politics are out. Global politics implying—and this we must emphasize today, because Marxism makes us forget it—leadership of the Occident, which means leadership of Europe. That is very strange, that they are fully agreed in that. And what is implied in these two points but which must nevertheless be stated: rejection of parliamentarian and constitutional democracy.

Now what are the differences, on the other hand? I think that is obvious. The ruling group for the foreseeable future according to Marx is the proletariat; for Nietzsche, the new masters. Now let us look at this difference for one moment. What is the general character of such a concept, like proletarians on the one hand, and masters (or other terms of the same kind) on the other? Proletarian, however vague and questionable, intends at least to be much more concrete than masters. More specifically, proletariat is defined in terms of the position of these particular men within the process of production. More generally stated, the Marxist doctrine and analysis is based on an appreciation of the importance of economics and technology. Historically, that means that Marx's doctrine is based on a British heritage, because where is the home of political economy, and even of technological or technocratic philosophy, but Great Britain? Nietzsche however has nothing but contempt for the British. That indicates the difference.

Now this has a very important practical consequence. Since Marx's ruling class, the proletariat,[3] is an outcome of his analysis of the economic situation, that leads to the consequence that Marx's objectives, strategy, and tactics are infinitely more specific than Nietzsche's political objectives, strategy, and tactics. And this explains to a certain extent why communism has a greater power than fascism. I'm sure that Stalin and Lenin and Molotov to a certain degree vitiate Marx's thought, but the vitiation of Marx's thought by Lenin is negligible compared with the vitiation of Nietzsche's thought by fascism. And that is no accident, because Marx,[4] when he spoke politically or socially, [was] much more specific than Nietzsche ever was. Fascism spoiled Nietzsche's thought by basing itself on nationalism, a thing which Nietzsche had consistently rejected. Fascism failed, in other words, to base itself on ideas of an essentially transnational appeal. Nietzsche's ideas did have that: it was the notion of the European future and more radically of the human future.

Now such merely national ideas are probably doomed to failure in an age in which merely national politics appear to be doomed to failure. In fairness to Mussolini and Hitler, one must say that this corruption of Nietzsche's ideas could hardly be avoided. Nietzsche's ideas lack mass support. Everyone who studies Nietzsche sees that the real meaning of these things can appeal only to a tiny minority of men. They lack mass support, but mass support is needed within mass societies. What is required today seems to be ideas which are susceptible of having supranational

[v] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1968), aphorism 749. Henceforth *WP*.

or international mass support, universal mass support. Nietzsche's ideas, being emphatically aristocratic, exclude that absolutely and condemn his political notions to powerlessness in an age of mass society.

There was a long discussion, especially during the Second World War, about the relation between Nazism and Nietzsche, and there was one school which said: There is no connection whatever between Nietzsche and fascism, because Nietzsche would have run away from Hitler and all his works. Of course he would; there is no doubt about that. But there were other people who said: What about the blond beast and other things which Nietzsche developed, is this not identical with what Goebbels and other people also present? That is also true. But nevertheless, the relation between Nietzsche and fascism is much more complex than the relation between Marx and present-day communism. The relation between Nietzsche and fascism can only be compared, I believe, with the relation between Rousseau and the French Revolution. Rousseau would of course have loathed Robespierre. Naturally! And why? Robespierre corrupted Rousseau; but he corrupted Rousseau and not, say, Voltaire. And so Hitler and Mussolini corrupted Nietzsche, but it was nevertheless Nietzsche, and [Nietzsche] is still discernable in the corruption.

I would also say there is another point, and that is a point which has something to do with the moral responsibility involved. There are certain kinds of sentences which a responsible man must never say and write. Nietzsche wrote a lot of sentences which a responsible man should never have written, because they were certain to be misused. When you go over the great writers of the past, the wise men—Plato, for example, but quite a few others—there are sentences in them which can be misused because there is not any sentence which cannot be misused. But we can say there is no sentence in Plato which can be misused by a man of normal intelligence and honesty. There are plenty of sentences in Nietzsche and in Rousseau which can be misused even by men of ordinary intelligence and ordinary honesty, and that is the deeper responsibility of Nietzsche's extremism.

Now to say a few more words about the relation between Nietzsche and fascism. There is in the first place the so-called aristocratic idea: some men or groups are or ought to be the masters of the rest. Second, the rejection of biblical morality in every form: exploitation is unobjectionable in every form; sparing of the weak; sympathy with the underdog; to everyone according to his needs is bad (it is not only not necessary, it is bad); the praise of ruthlessness and brutality in Nietzsche's remarks about the blond beast. There is no doubt that in Nietzsche's own doctrine these are only parts of a fundamentally humane doctrine and form only part of his argument. Nietzsche's superman is not Himmler or Hitler or some[one] of this kind but, as he put it, "Caesar with the soul of Christ,"[vi] in other words, the this-worldly strength and grandeur of Caesar with the compassion and human depth of Christ. But the savage part of Nietzsche's teaching could very easily be isolated from the broader context, especially since Nietzsche himself had presented it a few times in that isolated form, especially in his writing *Genealogy of Morals*.

Let us look a little bit more closely at Nietzsche's foundations, or more precisely at the premises of his analysis of morality. This is the doctrine we find in the *Genealogy of Morals*. Nietzsche

[vi] *WP*, aphorism 983.

believed he had reasons to say that the fundamental phenomenon of the world is the will to power—very ill-defined but constantly referred to, especially in his later writings. This leads to the notion that the fundamental and primary force of human existence is that of the warrior as distinguished from and opposed to the priest. That is the basis of Nietzsche's analysis. I don't want to go now into other things. Nietzsche used very much the evolutionary, anthropological, and ethnographic studies of the nineteenth century, and some linguistics. That is uninteresting. The crucial point is this: the will to power is the fundamental fact. Therefore, that human existence which is openly based on power and overpowering is the primary and most natural form of human life. The priest: that is of course also will to power; if will to power is the essence of life, that will be as much in the priest as in the warrior. But the priests are the weak ones; therefore the will to power takes there the form of slyness and devious ways, and ultimately of spirit and intellect. That is the revenge of the weak on the strong, and from this point of view they are even ultimately more important than the warriors from Nietzsche's own point of view. But in the primary way we have that.

Now if we look at that for one moment in a reasonable, unbiased, empirical way, what is the premise which is here tacitly made in this whole thing, if he makes such an analysis—warriors and priests—of at least the most interesting parts of earlier societies, with the whole emphasis on warriors and the priests coming in secondarily and in a questionable position? There is a premise here made which I think can be shown to be wrong empirically regardless of any theological or other premise one might have. Think of a simple society—think of old Sparta. Of course the key word is courage, manliness, warlike, the virtue of the warrior. But there is of course always something else . . . [vii] . . . It is impossible to have any notions of justice without seeking for a foundation of these notions. And especially not for early man is this possible. In other words, it is impossible to imagine any human society, especially a society antedating the philosophy of science, in which there is not a faculty at work which we might call the making of stories, [the] mythopoetic faculty. That we find everywhere, and certainly in those societies [of antiquity] in which Nietzsche was especially interested.[5] If this is so, if no society can exist without having some notion of itself as a society, that human whole of which everyone is a member, and therefore of the all-enclosing whole [with]in which this and all other societies exist, then it could seem [that] one must change Nietzsche's simplistic sociology immediately. There must be some man or body of men in the society, whether institutionalized or not, who give this fundamental account or transmit it from one generation to another. And that would seem to be the primary function of priests. They don't have to be priests; they may be called differently, they may not even be a special class, but such a function [as that of the priests] is as fundamental as war, because there can't be war if there is no group. War of individuals is not war. And the group is constituted by such [fundamental] beliefs. In this decisive respect, it seems to me, Marx's sociology or however you might call it and Nietzsche's sociology are suffering from exactly the same error. [In Marx] it is indeed not the will to power and the warrior but it is productivity which is the origin, but productivity never exists and cannot exist without a coeval concern of men to understand the whole. And Marx's thesis that the mythical and other notions of society are reflections of the process of productivity, of the stage of productivity, is merely a dogmatic assertion. There is no earthly reason why this notion of the whole should not be developed in some form of pantheism or whatnot wholly independently of the stage of production. The fundamental premise common to Nietzsche and Marx and so many other schools up to the

[vii] Ellipses in the transcript. It is likely that the tape was changed at this point.

present day is of course that the higher, or the more intellectual or spiritual, is derivative. Man's original equipment does not include the higher, the spiritual, but [these] must be understood as derivative from the lower. The lower may be productivity, mere primary satisfaction of wants and activity directed toward satisfaction of wants, or it may be will to power. There are great differences, no doubt, whether you understand this primary activity in Marx's or in Nietzsche's terms, but the fundamental dogmatic premise is the same.

Why did Nietzsche choose the will to power as the fundamental character of human life and of life in general? Today the word "power" is in very common use, especially in political science, and this itself should give some cause to reflect on this concept, because man succeeded very well for many centuries and millennia in analyzing political phenomena without making that use of power which is now so common. The term "power" becomes the central term in political or moral philosophy, as far as I know, only in the seventeenth century in Hobbes. In Hobbes we find the statement that the fundamental inclination of man is the desire for power after power that ceases only in death.[viii] That is the strongest and most emphatic statement on power of old times which I know. Then Hobbes also says science exists for the sake of power.[ix] Now what is power in this sense? Answer: means for ends. That is an explicit definition given by Hobbes: By power I understand the means which we have at present for obtaining our ends.[x] Emphasis on power means therefore a de-emphasis of ends. Why? Hobbes's answer: the notion of an end had found its simple expression in the concept of the highest good, *summum bonum*, and that was in the religious tradition identified with some bliss of afterlife. But that is not necessary, because Aristotle too speaks—and Plato—of the highest good, and [they] do not mean such an afterlife achievement. Hobbes says there is no highest end; all ends are, in present-day language, subjective. But one thing is clear: whatever end anyone might have, we always need means. Men always have ends, necessarily, because they have desires. But which desire they have cannot be said: there is an infinite variety, and nothing can be said to be better than the other. But in each case we need means, and these means are in a way limited—that is the implication—in a way in which the ends are not limited.

I also remind you, because that is of some importance for understanding Nietzsche, [that] Hobbes did not leave it at this mere subjectivity because he saw that while there is no highest good, there is a highest evil, one and only one highest evil. And that is death. And therefore, while we do not find any clarity and orientation if we look at the good things (because there is an infinite variety of them, completely chaotic), if we look at the evil things we find one outstanding [thing] giving our lives direction, and that is death. In other words, there is one and only one thing to run away from, but there is not one and only one thing to aspire toward. And Hobbes thought that would be enough. Now in practical terms that means the desire for self-preservation is the fundamental desire; and therefore we can have a normative political science based on the principle of self-preservation, and power is ultimately understood as the means for self-preservation—at least all legitimate power.

[viii] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 11.

[ix] Strauss translates the famous phrase from Hobbes's *De Corpore*: "*Scientia proper potentiam*." (*Opera Latina*, vol. 1, ed. William Molesworth (London: John Bohn, 1840), part 1, chap. 1.6, 6.

[x] "The power of a Man, (to take it Universally,) is his present means, to obtain some future apparent Good." *Leviathan*, chap. 10.

Now this self-preservation can be enlarged and must be enlarged because it is not only that man desires to preserve his being, but the brutes too. In the radical statement of Spinoza, self-preservation is common to all beasts.[xi] Now I come back to that. Self-preservation is meant here in Hobbes to act as the standard. In order to fulfill this function, it must be distinguished from something else and opposed to something else in order to act as a standard. Otherwise, if it is not distinguishable from something else, it cannot help us in choosing, in preferring. Now this other thing is, in Hobbes, pride. Self-preservation is fundamentally defensible, and therefore just and good; pride is fundamentally indefensible, and therefore unjust and bad. Self-preservation has to do with the genuine and substantial, say, food; whereas pride has to do with something imaginary, with what other people think about us. Self-preservation, in other words, is the rule of the body: it's solid, and pride is ghostly, spiritual.

This distinction between self-preservation and pride was taken up by a great successor of Hobbes, namely, Rousseau. Rousseau admitted that these standards are supplied to us by self-preservation, which he also called self-love. And he also distinguished it—opposes it to pride as a bad thing, only he calls it *amour-propre*. But that's pride or vanity. Rousseau makes here a big change, however, which is of some importance; namely, that he says that self-love or self-preservation is somehow allied with compassion. So the sound standard is supplied by a fundamental human desire which contains self-preservation and compassion and is opposed to pride. The man who is guided by self-love or self-preservation has his center in himself. In ordinary language, he is self-directed. By the way, that is the origin of this distinction.[xii] [6]The man who is guided by pride, vanity, etc., has his center in other human beings. In that present expression, he is other-directed. The man who is guided by self-preservation is free, therefore, because he does not live in inner dependence[7] [on] others, whereas the man appealed to by pride and vanity lives in inner dependence[8] [on] others.

Now there is a certain difficulty in Rousseau, because freedom has a somewhat ambiguous meaning. One doesn't see quite clearly in Rousseau whether freedom is understood by him as something required for the sake of self-preservation, which would mean I am the judge of the means conducive to self-preservation for myself, or whether freedom is not a more fundamental fact, namely, a spontaneity of the mind, a fundamental activity of man which is more fundamental than self-preservation. This notion of freedom as spontaneity, self-determination, autonomy, came to the fore in German philosophy, and that is the beginning of Marx. Against German idealism, he insists on the primacy of the bodily needs, in that respect following the older Hobbean tradition. But against materialism, Hobbes['s] and otherwise, he insists on the importance of spontaneity. I have mentioned this last time. Production or productivity is a Marxian synthesis of bodily wants and spontaneity. Yet production or productivity has one fundamental deficiency, because production or productivity is specifically human. And still in this stage what is universal would seem to be satisfaction of wants or, in other words, self-preservation. Nietzsche seeks from the outset a universal principle, a principle applicable to all beings which expresses the primacy of spontaneity and activity as distinguished from anything like mere self-preservation, mere adaptation to circumstances, etc. This is the meaning of the will to power. Nietzsche explicitly criticized the principle of self-preservation—he knew it only from

[xi] See *Ethics*, part 3, props. 6 and 7 and part 4, props. 20-22.

[xii] Strauss refers to the distinction between self- and other-directed made by David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney in *The Lonely Crowd* (1950).

Spinoza—and his criticism is this: self-preservation is still teleological, meaning it puts an end for the sake of which man acts. The will to power is nonteleological, and according to Nietzsche the only nonteleological principle. It is something like letting off steam for no end. Someone could say: Is not letting off steam itself a teleological principle? We don't have to go into that.

So let me say this to summarize the point. Nietzsche's will to power fulfills three conditions: (a) there are no natural ends; (b) primacy of spontaneity, of freedom; not something caused or occasioned by external facts; and (c) it is susceptible of being a universal principle, not only limited to man. By the way, in present-day parlance you sometimes find an equivalent to the will to power which I believe is not always recognized as such, and that is the word "growth."[xiii] Because when people speak today of growth, they don't mean by it what it[9] [meant] in former times. When people spoke of growth in former times, and I think today in common parlance, too, they would speak of the process which points to an end. Take a colt, or a puppy: they grow, and then there is a certain point when they don't grow. Now that applies of course to the human body also. In the human mind, this end can never be reached, it seems, and therefore we may speak of an infinite growth there; but this infinite growth must of course always be understood for the use of some end which, however, is reached never or only in a few cases. But when people speak today of growth, no end is visualized: a growth without an end. That is something like the will to power. The difference is only this: that whereas Nietzsche's will to power implied that someone is going to get hurt if a fellow grows, because he is likely to trespass like trees in a jungle on other trees; but in the philosophy of growth as frequently preached in this country there is somehow a hope that all may grow as they please and no one is going to get hurt in the process. Whether that is only a sign of the kindness of these men or whether there is a principle involved, that is a longer question.

How then does Nietzsche's general understanding of human nature look from the principle of the will to power? Now the will to power is in its fullest form the will to power of the strong, and as such it is perfectly compatible with and even in need of pride. But contrary to what Rousseau said and Hobbes implied, pride as Nietzsche understands it has—this proud strong human being [who has] his center in himself. Nietzsche makes the distinction between pride and vanity. The vain person is dependent upon the opinion of others, and is therefore necessarily weak. Now what is the alternative to the will to power in the strong combined with pride? Nietzsche's word is "resentment," a term which he uses in a sense going beyond the ordinary meaning of resentment. Those weak [ones] who are habitually in an inferior position are determined in their whole beings by a resentment against those who are better off by nature or by accident, and the resentment is the will to power of the weak. Now it is resentment, not pride, which is the root of evil in Nietzsche's sense of the term, which really corrupts a man in his very heart. And Nietzsche made the attempt, especially in the *Genealogy of Morals*, to show that the biblical morality of love is nothing but the most subtle fruit of the resentment of the weak. In other words, to humiliate the strong and healthy and proud in their own eyes by setting up the norm of love and charity by which they would, against nature as it were, be compelled to be the nurses of the weak. The strong nursing the weak is the fundamental absurdity of biblical morality secularized in modern socialism.

Next time I will try to explain the problem of history as it appears in Nietzsche.

[xiii] See, e.g., John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (1916).

[1] Moved “be.”
[2] Deleted “gross”
[3] Deleted “—that.”
[4] Moved “was.”
[5] Moved “of antiquity.”
[6] Deleted “whereas”
[7] Deleted “of.”
[8] Deleted “of.”
[9] Deleted “means.”

Session 16: no date
TheWill to Power

Leo Strauss: [In progress] . . . is the will to power of these super-gorillas not a quite peculiar one? Is the will to power of a being which is somehow able to embark on the venture of humanization not radically different from the will to power of rabbits, mice and so on? There must then be an essential difference between men and brutes from the very beginning. The human will to power must be different from the will to power of brutes. Now Nietzsche does not raise the question of the essential difference between men and brutes, and therefore the place of the question of the essential difference between men and brutes is taken by the quasi-historical description of the genesis of man—obviously not a substitute. We see something similar here again in Marx. In Marx, the principle is not will to power but productivity. It is not too difficult to see the connection, I suppose, between will to power and productivity; they are twin brothers. Now productivity is indeed in Marx from the very beginning a human principle, because the animals, brutes do not produce proper[ly speaking]. But still, does not productivity as this human possibility presuppose reason? Now if that is so, it is highly unreasonable to expect that man's doings must be understood in terms of productivity alone, because that productive animal is also the rational animal, and maybe his rationality explains certain things in a natural way which his productivity does not explain. I have mentioned this subject last time in a somewhat different context.

I repeat my question: Why the will to power, and what has the will to power to do with history? To answer this question, we must turn to the problem of history as Nietzsche saw it. Now Nietzsche has written fairly early in his life an essay, *On the Use and Abuse of History*, which is the first statement of the problem of history and, in spite of great deficiencies which it has, an epochmaking work. I state the difficulty only in the most simple terms, omitting everything which is not absolutely essential. The starting point of Nietzsche's analysis of history was the fact that in German intellectual life, especially academic life, historical studies were about to overpower all other kinds of interest[s], the phenomenon which people ordinarily mean by historicism—especially in philosophy, philosophy had been transformed into the study of history of philosophy. What was behind that? What were the presuppositions of it? An obsession with the fact of historical change, the alleged or real realization of something which is now known by the name of relativism. All ideals or values change. All ideals or values are perishable. History is that human pursuit which shows that this is so. And why is this so? An historical study of,[1] say,[2] a given ideal shows you that it was destined to perish, showing you its humble origins, the peculiar conditions which gave rise to it, and teaches[i] you therefore that with the disappearance of these peculiar conditions the ideal itself is bound to disappear. That is presupposed by Nietzsche [and was] common to him and his contemporaries in Germany.

Nietzsche's verdict about this relativism or historicism is this: It is true but deadly. Deadly because this insight in[to] the perishable character of all ideas must of course include the

[i] In the transcript: "teaches (?)"

conclusion that our ideals and our [. . .] too is perishable, and man cannot live on that basis. Life requires faith in ideals, and this faith is necessarily undermined by historical analysis in particular, and by the historicist insight in general.[ii] In other words, life requires delusion. We must believe in the finality of our values, although we can't help knowing that they cannot be final. Life requires delusion. Delusion is better than truth. Delusion is the condition of life, meaning especially of that highest form of life which Nietzsche still called culture, though he doesn't mean what the anthropologists mean now by culture but what some other people, like Spengler and Eliot,[iii] I believe, also mean by culture—which is something different, as you probably know.

So in the meantime these thoughts of Nietzsche have become very popular all over the Western world, and in every newspaper article I believe you find an allusion to that, or almost an allusion to that. Today you find that very frequently people say: We must have a new culture. [iv] You know? They notice certain forms of [. . .] we must have a new culture, and then they say: Well, yes, you can't get that just by forcing painters to paint better paintings and poets to write better poems, but people must *believe* in something, and therefore they demand a myth. Now that is of course the most stupid interpretation of Nietzsche which is possible, because if you know it is a myth you *can't* believe in it,[3] [unless] you have some methods of intoxication which have perhaps other unsalutary effects. This thought is developed by Nietzsche with great force and in very suggestive formulae.[v] I don't repeat them, because I must turn immediately to the other side of the picture, which is this.

Historical analysis is said to give us the truth. That's the premise of Nietzsche. Now historical analysis means to use equivalents, objective analysis, detached study of human affairs. And that means, in other words, historical studies: objective historical studies are detached studies of undetached human beings. It's obvious that the historical actors are not detached. Take a historian of Lincoln: he's detached. Lincoln was not not-detached; otherwise, how could he have acted if he were detached? There is, in other words, a disproportion between the historian and his objects. Let us take very crude cases. Can you be a historian of music if you do not understand and appreciate music? There must be some harmony between the student and subject. Or take the case of philosophy. Can you understand the history of philosophy if you do not yourself philosophize? Or will you only get a kind of filing cabinet instead of a real history[vi] of philosophy if you do not yourself philosophize? The conclusion: the objective, relativistic historian does *not* understand history. Historical understanding requires what is now called commitment on the part of the historian, and that means, simply, relativism is not true. This contradiction is not resolved in the first writing of Nietzsche that relativism is true but deadly, and the other statement, relativism is not true. In that attitude nothing human can be understood. Objectivity and truth are incompatible. Truth is necessarily subjective. That makes sense but leads us to a very great difficulty because there is more than one subjective truth: there's a variety of subjective truths. And what becomes of the oneness of truth which we always mean

[ii] The transcriber notes: "[last portion not clear]."
[iii] Oswald Spengler, author of *Decline of the West* (1918), and presumably T. S. Eliot, "Notes Towards the Definition of Culture" (1948).
[iv] In the transcript: "new (?) culture"
[v] In the transcript: "formulae (?)"
[vi] The transcriber notes: "[not clear]."

when speaking of truth? This part of Nietzsche's argument is today extremely influential in Western thought, especially in Europe but to a certain extent also in this country, and it is now known by the name of existentialism. The originator of existentialism is really Nietzsche, not Kierkegaard, because in Kierkegaard there is only one subjective truth, namely, that of Christianity in radically Protestant interpretation, whereas for Nietzsche the problem takes on [. . .] because there is in principle a variety of subjective truths.

Now Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power is an attempt to overcome subjectivism, this existential or committed subjectivism, by integrating it into a larger whole. I will try to explain that. *Beyond Good and Evil* is I think Nietzsche's greatest work, the most mature and most sober work which Nietzsche wrote. The earlier writings are not so mature as this work is, and the later ones are hectic, immoderate, almost insane. Now in the preface of *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche stated[vii] his position clearly enough if we know how to read him. I read to you a passage before:

"Supposing that truth is a woman—what then? Is there not grounds for suspecting that all philosophers, insofar as they have been dogmatists, have failed to understand women? That the terrible seriousness and clumsy importunity with which they have usually paid their addresses to truth have been unskilled and unseemly methods for winning a woman? Certainly she has never allowed herself to be won—and at present every kind of dogma stands with sad and discouraged mien. If indeed it stands at all! For there are scoffers who maintain that it has fallen, that all dogma lies on the ground—nay more, that it is at its last gasp."[viii]

Nietzsche rejects all dogmatic philosophy. That in itself is in no way novel, because the whole positivistic movement and the whole Kantian movement of the nineteenth century did the same. But Nietzsche means something more special,[ix] which he indicates by playing with the notion that truth might be a woman. Now what does that mean? That was deliberately chosen. In the first place, a woman is a living being, so truth is not impersonal. And in the second place, well, there were people who said that truth is personal, is identical with a personal being: God is the truth. That is also rejected by Nietzsche. Truth is desirable, but not venerable and personal. Now what does this mean? The principle of dogmatic philosophy as Nietzsche understands it means that there is an unchangeable impersonal truth—verities, eternal verities, Platonic ideas, laws of nature in the Galileian or Newtonian sense, or what have you—and therefore dogmatic philosophy presupposes a pure mind which apprehends the truth. Nietzsche includes in this notion of course modern natural science, whose anonymous observer is a modification—a minor modification, one could almost say—of Plato's pure mind which apprehends the ideas. The principle of Nietzsche is that there is no pure mind, as is shown by two fundamental facts. The first: there is no mind without a body and in such a way that the peculiar character of the body determines the peculiar character of the mind. One example, which has now[4] [achieved] great success—ah, commonplace success in the world, Nietzsche says somewhere: the sexuality of a being shows itself in the highest forms of his spirituality.[x] The whole Freudian notion is not only

[vii] In the transcript: "stated (?)"
[viii] Presumably Strauss's translation. See *BGE,* preface.
[ix] In the transcript: "special (?)"
[x] *Beyond Good and Evil,* aphorism 75: "The degree and kind of a man's sexuality reaches up into the ultimate pinnacle of his spirit." *BGE,* 81.

implied but known to Nietzsche in principle: there is no pure mind because of the body. And the second reason is history: mind is ever historically affected. All these things which are now discussed in such a crude manner under the heading "the subconscious" are meant by Nietzsche in a much broader way, and that is precisely what makes impossible a pure mind.

What follows from that? That all human thought is perspectivic, as Nietzsche called it, meaning thinking in a specific perspective, from a specific perspective. What does this thinking, this perspectivic thinking mean? Human thought, we may say, organizes some data. Let us call them "x's." Human thought organizes these data with a view to its own needs,[xi] with a view to its own will. Human thought puts its stamp on what is given to it. But that's it already: thought is will to power. In other words, when Nietzsche says the essence of things is the will to power, he thinks primarily of human thought and not of some [. . .] [LS thumps the table for emphasis] Human thought is will to power. That has a long prehistory. When Kant says—Kant, who is so intensely moral and serious contrasted with the half-immoral, half-unserious Nietzsche—when Kant says the human mind or understanding prescribes nature its laws, he implied such a thing as a will to power to organize the sense data. And you can go some steps back, so that you don't think that there are merely these unreasonable Germans who think these thoughts: Hobbes, a very respectable Englishman—at least today very respectable, he was not always [. . .] who said: We understand only what we make. What does that mean? An exercise of human power organizing, constructing, creating, however you might call it: that is the fundamental fact.[xii] Thought is not apprehending as it has been in the traditional view, but if it is not apprehending what else could it be but will to power? That is at least a very defensible contention.

Now Nietzsche's own philosophy of will to power is of course also personal, perspectivic, and Nietzsche knew that very well. The last aphorism of *Beyond Good and Evil* makes this very beautifully clear: that all these things which were presented in the book with a seeming dogmatism on the part of Nietzsche are then presented only as my thoughts.[xiii] That's the way in which he sees things; that's all his perspective. But Nietzsche says also that this doctrine which he develops is a hypothesis—a favorite term of his—and is a hypothesis subject to objective validation or invalidation. Read only the preface to the *Genealogy of Morals*, where he presents certain hypotheses regarding the origin of human valuation and expects that anthropologists and all kinds of diggers dig up the past and prove [. . .][xiv] Needless to say, as I said before, that Nietzsche constantly argues—that's not just a prophesy or poem[xv]—and tries to refute alternative hypotheses. Now how can we reconcile this emphatically personal subjective character of Nietzsche's philosophy[5] with his belief somehow, his serious . . . his conviction that he is teaching the truth in the way in which all philosophers have thought that? We can also state it as follows. If all truth is necessarily personal and subjective, do we not arrive at complete chaos? I mean, that is what vulgar relativism of course always means. Nietzsche would argue as follows: that he can show that whereas all other comprehensive hypotheses have been refuted, as he claims indeed [that] his hypothesis is the only one of which he knows and of which he can think

[xi] In the transcript: "needs (?)"
[xii] In the transcript: "fact (?)"
[xiii] *Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorism 296. *BGE*, 236-37.
[xiv] *On The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), preface, 15-23.
[xv] In the transcript: "poem (?)"

which is unrefuted. Which is possible,[xvi] but why is it a hypothesis? Answer: There may be surprises in the future, and some things might be discovered or invented which disprove that hypothesis.

How can we understand that more adequately? The hypothesis of Nietzsche, the philosophy of the will to power, is *primarily* a hypothesis about the human soul. As becomes particularly clear from *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche's philosophy means psychology, but not psychology as understood in academic psychology but much closer in inspiration to Platonic Aristotelian psychology: understanding[xvii] of the soul. Nietzsche speaks of the soul still; [he] doesn't speak merely of behavior. So Nietzsche's hypothesis is primarily a hypothesis about the human soul. Now this hypothesis, as hypothesis about the human soul, can't help affecting the human soul. In other words, this hypothesis may change the human soul. What is not true now may become true. In other words, the validation or invalidation which Nietzsche has in mind is not merely that by future psychology and sociology—that he would not regard as very important—but whether this proposition he makes to man really will be accepted and is acceptable to man and arouses a response. That is a kind of test. That is what Nietzsche meant when he speaks sometimes of philosophizing with a hammer, or what later on came to be called decisionism. That does not mean in the primary[xviii] sense that we are confronted with a variety of possibilities and we just decide for one. Then one can rightly say: So what? You have made your decision but that doesn't alter the situation a bit. Nietzsche meant this: he's thinking of the kind of decision which changes reality and therefore becomes true.[xix] Also, by the way, some kinship with Marx on this point.

However this may be, Nietzsche does not leave it at this assertion, that this is the best hypothesis available [and] in fact the only comprehensive hypothesis which is not refuted and therefore may affect men and change men and become true in that way. He does not leave it at that, as I said: he claims finality for his doctrine in spite of everything else. How can he do that if his view of change, of history, of the acquisition of humanity and the other things are correct? There can, I think, be only one answer,[xx] just as in the case of Hegel and Marx. There may be an absolute moment in history, absolute peak. Now indeed one can describe the relation of Nietzsche to Hegel in this respect as follows. The position which the present Europe, meaning Europe [in] 1810, let me say, occupied in Hegel's thought is occupied in Nietzsche's thought by the future of Europe. So Nietzsche doesn't claim to live in the absolute moment, but to anticipate it, just as Marx does. But it is the absolute moment, and therefore in the decisive respect no changes are possible. There is also another important difference between Nietzsche and Hegel in this respect. Hegel had said in the preface to his *Philosophy of Right*: "The owl of Minerva, of the goddess of wisdom, begins its flight in the dusk,"[xxi] meaning wisdom, understanding, comes at the end, when life has exhausted its possibilities, when life is no longer [. . .] so that the life of a culture, the peak of the life of a culture, and the understanding of that culture cannot possibly coincide.

[xvi] In the transcript: "possible (?)"
[xvii] In the transcript: "understanding (?)"
[xviii] In the transcript: "true (?)"
[xix] In the transcript: "true (?)"
[xx] The transcriber notes: "[not clear]."
[xxi] Strauss's translation. See Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 13. Knox translates the famous sentence thus: "The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk."

The favorite time indication for Nietzsche is noon, a term which occurs throughout in all kinds of [. . .] For Nietzsche, because of the essential connection between the mind and life or body, or however you call it, there must be one peak: the peak of life and the peak of thought must coincide. And therefore what Nietzsche is thinking of is an absolute peak of human life coinciding with the peak of thought, the culmination point of the historical process—say, early twentieth century or so, he must have thought. And another important difference between Nietzsche and Hegel: whereas in Hegel and in Marx this absolute moment is one, a unique moment—I mean, it may last for centuries or millennia; that doesn't do away with that, for there is only one historical process, of course—for Nietzsche it means eternal return. There is an infinite number of historical processes which all will culminate, must culminate, in a peak.

We can also raise a question as follows regarding the will to power, and we must raise it in this form. Why does not Nietzsche leave it an analysis . . . of course one cannot leave it at an analysis of the present situation, but why does not Nietzsche leave it at an analysis of man, and [instead] go beyond that and develop this fantastic doctrine of the will to power as a universal principle, meaning a principle of all beings, all life? The answer I think one has to give is this: that man cannot be understood by himself. Man is not self-explanatory. Man must be understood either in the light of the superhuman or the subhuman. According to the fashion of [the] modern time, Nietzsche chose the subhuman, so he was forced to develop a doctrine of the will to power as a universal principle.

In every respect, it seems, Nietzsche occupies the extreme counterposition to Plato, and that was certainly his own claim. The pure mind apprehending the truth, in Plato; in Nietzsche, the personal individual subject in his individuality imposing his own will on what is given and thus making a picture of the . . . creating a whole originating only in the individual subject. And secondly, which is only the equivalent, the will to power takes the place of what Plato called *eros*, desire or love. That is the exact Platonic equivalent to that, that life means being directed towards something—on all levels, but especially important to us is the case of man. And in Nietzsche[6] the will to power is not directed towards something, but if it has any direction it is directed towards its neighbors, if I may say so, but not only in the crude sense of the individual trying to lord it over others, but for the philosopher or thinker to overcome alternative possibilities. Not the transcendent truth but a transcending of all given positions, that is knowledge. Again Nietzsche has stated in an amazing way what was so common in the nineteenth century. For what does the idea of progress mean in its more radical form except that it is not progress towards a goal apprehended at all stages, and therefore guiding men at all stages, but it means a realization of the dissatisfaction of what you have or what you know and trying to overcome that *without* a clear apprehension of what you are driving at?[xxii] So even from [this] point of view it would seem that the philosophy [of] will to power—how fantastic this sounds[xxiii]—is an amazingly radical and clear description of what the modern mind as modern mind was driving at. In spite of the fact that Nietzsche is at the opposite and diametrically opposed pole to Plato, much more than any other thinker I know of, he[7] rediscovered parts of Plato's thoughts which have been completely lost in the Platonist tradition. By the very fact of his radical opposition to Plato he was able to see certain things which the followers of Plato, at least in the modern centuries, have no longer seen.

[xxii] The transcriber proposes that Strauss might have said "(?striving for).
[xxiii] In the transcript: "sounds (?)"

I think I leave it at these remarks, because I must have raised a large number of difficult and insoluble questions—insoluble certainly now. But perhaps I can clarify one or the other points before we separate. We have plenty of time.

Student: [I] didn't understand what you meant regarding Nietzsche's position as far as a variety of historical processes are concerned.

LS: Oh, I see. Well, the eternal return. Well, when[8] [people] speak of—well, we don't speak of it any more, but some people did [a] short time ago—of the historical process, what do they mean? A process which began, say, fifty thousand, a hundred thousand years ago—maybe even two billion years ago, for all I know, and will go on for another two billion years, and period.[xxiv] That I call a unique process. Nietzsche said: That's impossible; even granting that the whole solar system will perish again, there must be other solar systems and therefore other possibilities of the development of man, other historical processes. Does this not make sense? Because otherwise you have to say that this is a unique constellation, that there were human beings on earth having a history could never happen again. And figure it out in infinite time,[xxv] whether this makes sense. So Nietzsche consciously restored a classical notion. You know? The eternal return. If you don't have a creation of the universe by an omnipotent God, there is no alternative except it—no, there are three possibilities. Either the eternity of the visible universe, the Aristotelian view[9]: there were always men on earth, there will always be. The second view is the beginning in time, creation by an omnipotent God; and then, since this is created by the unfathomable will of God, God could have willed that this process was only once, of course. But if both views are rejected, there is only the alternative at least of the possibility of[10] an infinite number of returns of this earth.[xxvi] This doctrine had disappeared from the general consciousness through the influence of both Aristotle and the biblical tradition; and Nietzsche, I think, was the only philosopher who submitted it again to consideration—without success, I believe. I mean, he didn't find, he didn't [. . .] That alone doesn't dispose of it, of course. Is it now clear what I meant?

Student: [. . .]

LS: We must make a distinction. The passionate concern with the future is not peculiar to Nietzsche, of course. It predominated all typically nineteenth-century thought, especially Marxism, to take just one example, but many [. . .] All the people who were neither Marxists nor Nietzscheans, you know . . . look up any book around 1900—not any book, there were some doubts, of course, but most of them. That was predominant. So the passionate concern with the future was predominant. That's not characteristic. Nietzsche gave this concern with the future a different turn by saying that there is an alternative to the hundred percent egalitarian, classless communist society, namely, an aristocratic society. That is the difference. But the passionate concern for the future and therefore the premises of that are the same in Nietzsche and his opponents.

[xxiv] In the transcript: "period (?)"
[xxv] In the transcript: "time (?)"
[xxvi] In the transcript: "earth (?)"

Now what I meant by the influence of Nietzsche on the climate of the twentieth century, that I think shows in an infinite number of ways—in the crudest way of course in the Nazis. It would have been impossible to have made such statements which Hitler and Goebbels and such people made if Nietzsche had not prepared the climate by [. . .] which in Nietzsche are extreme and almost marginal. But the use of—I mean, the magic of the extreme, as Nietzsche called it;[xxvii] the magic of the extreme, that created a new language. And one way of using that and using it with tremendous popular success was what the Nazis, and in another way also Mussolini, did. Compare it with the influence of Rousseau. One could not say that it was an extreme as extreme which Rousseau presented, although it may accidentally have been extreme. What Rousseau did was [to] create these strange hopes for a perfect society in the near future, and with a peculiar mixture of Roman virtue and sentimentality, this peculiar taste which you see in the French Revolutionary period up to the Napoleonic period inclusively and in much of the [. . .] of the time. That was the distinctive climate, and similarly Nietzsche did [. . .] The influence of Nietzsche will show up in all kinds of ways: in modern poetry, in infinite ways. In one thing you are perfectly right. The future, progress, has ceased to be such an obsession with Western man, and that is of course one reason why not only Nietzsche but Marx and quite a few other things have lost this peculiar limited evidence[xxviii] which their teaching had for some time. Nietzsche became popular in our age only in the form of existentialism; and there is nothing of progress and future anymore—this part is completely abandoned. I didn't mean that—I mean, one can perhaps say that existentialism has preserved historicism and divorced it completely from the prospects of future, and that is the peculiar predicament of existentialism. You know that as long as you can think of a higher and better future the perishability of anything you cherish is bearable, because you know [that] if it will perish, something greater and superior will come. But if that is completely abandoned, it only means one perishable order will be replaced by another perishable order—a sequence of messes, to put it bluntly, and no hope and comfort from something eternal. Then there is fatalism.[xxix]

Student: Concern with will to power could be interpreted in a momentary sense.

LS: Yes, it could, but it means of course abandonment of fifty percent of Nietzsche. That is exactly what existentialism is doing, and they believe that this is a more reasonable position than Nietzsche. That is a long question, but that is where we stand today. No one speaks of the will to power. I mean, "growth" is Dewey's substitute for the will to power, but that is not so offensive to our ears and is, I think, in every respect more harmless than Nietzsche. But existentialism is of course the only way in which Nietzsche affects present-day thought. One can safely say that Nietzsche himself would have regarded this—that doesn't mean a thing, of course, but still one must say that—that Nietzsche himself would have regarded this as an impossible way out of his difficulty. And one could show,[11] I think, that even theoretically Nietzsche has some points there which are not taken—I mean, I'm not speaking now of the will to power but only of the general structure of his doctrine, [which] seems to be not exposed to the difficulties to which existentialism is exposed.

[xxvii] *WP*, aphorisms 749, 396.
[xxviii] In the transcript: "evidence (?)"
[xxix] In the transcript: "fatalism (?)"

Student: Would Nietzsche claim that he understood the fundamental alternatives open to the infinite number of historical processes which he posited?

LS: No.

Student: So that the number and character of the peaks of each of these processes may vary infinitely?

LS: Do you mean to say of other solar systems? How could he [. . .] But he could only know that [. . .] assuming that this is *the* truth, he could of course say the peak of any other period can't be anything but the realization of this truth. That's all. Of course he couldn't have any empirical knowledge of that. No, I thought you meant something else, and that's a greater question: that Nietzsche assumed that all alternatives, or hypotheses as he sometimes says, have been refuted. Did he know all alternatives? In other words, is it possible from his point of view to say that all the thoughts of the past have been really understood? And he says: No. There is a remark which also made a great history in the meantime, that there are sentences, for example, in Thucydides, which will come to speak [to readers] perhaps only in a few centuries, and now we just don't pay any attention to them. By the way, in a crude way that's of course true: you see that Thucydides is being read now by nonhistorians in a way in which he was not read in the nineteenth century, because the civil strife and this total war described by Thucydides is now known to us from experience in a way in which it was not known from experience to men in the nineteenth century. In a crude way, that's of course true. Nietzsche would simply say: Well, regardless, Thucydides may have had certain insights which we simply don't have now and we cannot even recover now, lacking the experience; but regarding the fundamental points, that is refuted. All earlier thought is refuted fundamentally because all earlier thought lacked historical sense. That [Nietzsche][12] says repeatedly.

Student: [. . .]

LS: No. In other words, any alternative to Nietzsche's position would be beyond Nietzsche, couldn't be a return. A return is impossible [. . .] But that is absolutely progressivistic thought.

Student: But it is possible that Nietzsche would admit the possibility of the future superman fundamentally transforming his own doctrine?

LS: Sure.

Student: In that event, I don't see how he can assert that every single historical process, insofar as it has a peak, has to have a peak like his.

LS: Well, that is another part of the argument. I distinguished various steps: one in which he regarded his doctrine as the best available hypothesis; and the other in which he said it is final. In fairness to Nietzsche, one must say that he died when he was fairly young. You know, he became insane when he was forty-four, and [. . .] knows how he would have solved that. But [in] his last

work, his unfinished *The Will to Power*, there it is presented as the final doctrine, no longer as a hypothesis. That seems to have been the position towards which he worked.[xxx]

Student: Well, may I phrase the question this way. Would he not have to change his notion as to the temporary character of his doctrine with respect to the superman in order to [. . .]

LS: No, but I think ultimately his doctrine is in this respect akin to that of Marx. The absolute moment is anticipated, and therefore the decisive truth is known.

Student: Wouldn't any general truth like will to power have to be the result of pure mind in the last analysis?

LS: No, I think Nietzsche would in the first place say that the doctrine of the will to power is an expression of a specific soul, in the first place of this individual, Nietzsche. But this individual Nietzsche is more than just one individual among many because he is the incarnation, as it were, of the Western soul in its most advanced stage. So the will to power therefore is primarily an expression of the Western soul in its most advanced stage. Pure mind in the Platonic sense would mean that man as man is capable of grasping the truth, and only accidental conditions—very hard life, climate which makes impossible leisure, and all this kind of thing—can accidentally prevent it, but in principle it's accessible to man as man. Nietzsche would say it is not in principle accessible to man as man. The human soul itself had to change so that it would be capable of seeing it because it *is* it.

Student: [. . .]

LS: Yes, that is the difficulty with which Nietzsche wrestled throughout, and one can very well say he has not solved it. We find these three possibilities of interpreting Nietzsche, and all three can be well defended: (a) "painted thoughts," meaning that his thoughts—his, this individual Nietzsche's private thoughts presented as his private thoughts, [the] observations of an individual, he gives them for what they are worth, period; (b) the best available hypothesis with a claim to universality now, which of course the first thing doesn't have; and (c)[13] the final true doctrine. All three things are in Nietzsche.[xxxi]

Student: [. . .]

LS: I think one must really try to understand this, because you will come across this difficulty every time you go beyond the confines of [the] positivistic methodology of the social sciences because the only competing doctrine today, if I disregard neo-Thomism, is really existentialism, more and more, and existentialism is precisely the doctrine of the subjective truth. And the way in which these people have tried to elaborate this more fully than Nietzsche did (but it is fundamental[ly] Nietzsche's position), that the truth, meaning the relevant and important truth, is necessarily subjective and there cannot be a *relevant* truth which is universal, that leads obviously to certain difficulties. And Nietzsche, being aware of these difficulties, developed for these reasons also the two alternatives: the best available hypothesis and the final doctrine.

[xxx] In the transcript: "worked (?)"

[xxxi] The transcriber notes that an unintelligible question and answer follows.

Student: [. . .]

LS: I think one can state this as follows, independently of Nietzsche's own formulation. In the vulgar version of existentialism, which is that of Sartre,[xxxii] the thesis of existentialism is presented as follows: There is no objective certainty. All certainty is subjective. Now if someone comes with science, Sartre would argue, as Nietzsche himself did, that science itself rests on certain basic hypotheses which always remain hypotheses, and therefore there is no objective certainty: that is based on a peculiar kind of subjectivity, say, on an average human subjectivity, and is irrelevant. So there is no objective certainty. But is not this sentence meant to be objectively certain? The simple old-fashioned Socratic-Platonic difficulty: we can't run away from reason. You can also put it this way: you can say that's a very formalistic consideration. But I believe it is really crucial, because every existentialist philosophy necessarily says something about existence as existence with a claim to universal validity. That can't be avoided. And the only qualification that they can make is that this understanding of existence as existence was not possible except now. So it is not accessible to man as man. That's the only qualification which is possible. Whether this qualification saves the situation is another matter. What I would say is this. Nietzsche doubtless discovered this notion of committed thought, of subjective thought, which is now so well known. But it was not merely the fact that the tradition still had a great hold on Nietzsche which it no longer has on present-day existentialists, but I believe it was due to an awareness of this difficulty into which one comes that Nietzsche went over to these alternatives I sketched. To repeat: the best hypothesis, and the second, the final truth. Well, it seems that Plato is of course more evident or more reasonable to reasonable men—I believe that too—but there are difficulties in Plato also.

Student: [. . .]

LS: No. I don't think Nietzsche thought for one moment of philosophers as philosophers ruling. He thought, as Plato fundamentally meant it, and Aristotle too, [of][14] philosophers living in that society as their inspiration, and rulers should be men trained by them.

Student: But how would the peak in society be known if it exists just in the minds of those few?

LS: Well, I think it would show. Let us assume that Nietzsche's freedom would have to come true,[xxxiii] that Europe out of fear of Russia—that's the way he presents it sometimes—forgets about these silly animosities, becomes united[15] [and] is then capable of holding its own, but not only holding its own but exercising global control—which in fact Europe did in the nineteenth century, you know—[and] solving in this way all the [. . .] economic problems of Europe, getting markets for your surplus and so on. And then this Europe becomes strong, powerful, healthy, and can last for many generations. Now with the rise to power of the right kind of people, there would be a change even on the visible level: the level of general manners, eradication of demagoguery with all its ugly aspects, a higher taste in buildings, for example. There would be a new ruling caste with all the alleged or real merits of a ruling caste. In other words, the tone of

[xxxii] Sartre's existentialism as worked out in *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (1943).
[xxxiii] In the transcript in this sentence: "freedom (?); "true (?)"

society would no longer be given, as Nietzsche contended would necessarily be the case in modern democracy, by actors and actresses, but by really great men [with] some touch of Roman virtue. That was more or less his notion, I believe it would show. But as you know quite well, it didn't happen. Two world wars were perfectly sufficient to ruin Europe for all possible future, I think you will admit. I mean, is it not ridiculous to think now of Europe as the leading continent? Europe was never in such a position as she is now.[xxxiv]

Student: Turning from Nietzsche, as prospective teachers, what is the alternative to the history of political philosophy?

LS: The usual presentation of the history of political theory—I mean, I am speaking of Sabine,[xxxv] and I have seen some other [. . .] present or are supposed to present a variety of venerable impossibilities [. . .] instead of thinking in the first place that these were men of the greatest minds of whom we know, who tried to find out *the* truth about those things [which are most important] for man living his life[16]—I mean the ordering of society. In other words, what I think is this. To a certain extent today the teaching of political theory is inevitable, and I wouldn't mind that but it depends very much on how it is meant. Whether the intention of these men, which they all have in common, is taken seriously or is just taken as a delusion, and you, the typical representative of this view, are standing on a peak, and we look down on the pygmies who had this strange notion that it was our duty to try to find out something about it. This general attitude is the most important thing, to which I would add another consideration. Let us not fool ourselves. I mean, if someone gets his Ph.D in theory, even as a major he knows infinitely little. Even if he is an A student.[xxxvi] I include myself, too, of course, not only as a man who has his Ph.D but also as an old hand at that matter. It is an absolutely absurd notion that we—I disregard any genius among you whom I don't know—fairly little men should believe that we can rush [at][17] a speed of sixty miles per hour through something [for which][18] the greatest minds needed a whole lifetime. I think that is the fundamental absurdity in that survey of history of philosophy. I honestly [don't] believe that [any man in his senses can do that], not only as teaching in one semester and one year, but even as a book, and maybe two and maybe three or four volumes.[19] It could be done in these halcyon days a generation or two ago, where people still had an excuse for believing that they knew better. We have no longer that excuse. We know now that we are in a mess, intellectually especially. And the importance of Nietzsche, in spite of all the nonsense he may have said, is that he has created this awareness of the mess. I think that we are now really able to understand, given a little push, that we are really ignorant: not of facts, but of the things which are infinitely more important than any particular facts, namely, what is the truth about these matters. And I think that we can also see that the question of the truth about them is not, as the logical positivists say, a meaningless question, but a very important question. To try to put it simply, if we know that we are ignorant regarding the most important subjects, we are respectable beginners, respectable because we are not conceited, we are not arrogant, and we

[xxxiv] The transcriber notes: "[This whole paragraph is rather unclear, some asides etc. have been omitted and mistakes may have been made.]"
[xxxv] George Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (1937).
[xxxvi] In the transcript: "[?]"

have a[xxxvii] path set out before us. If you approach the field with this attitude and with the necessary consciousness[xxxviii] on every level, that is the very first thing.

The practical consequence, I believe, would be that—but no beginning college teacher will have the authority to make such changes . . .[xxxix] . . . abolish it! That cannot be effected by a college teacher, for very obvious reasons of power, and therefore the only thing you can do is to make the best of a bad situation. I believe I know one way out, from a purely bureaucratic point of view, and that could be done if one had the help of a dozen[20] younger men. And it is this. It is a legitimate interest, I think, of college students and also other people to have some reliable, unpretentious information about the dogmas, if I may say so, about the final results at which the great political philosophers arrived. That's a legitimate interest, just as it is a legitimate interest to read a book which gives you the plots of all Greek plays, which for certain purposes and in a certain context is a very legitimate thing and very unpretentious. But it must be done very well. This book of about two hundred pages might consist of about fifteen chapters, and each chapter devoted to one of the great political philosophers and doing nothing but to state the most elementary, unquestionable, and evident things about what he set out to do: how he approached the fundamental political question, and what the [. . .] No sauce, no custard of any kind—sociological, psychological, or whatnot—permitted. In these present-day textbooks, I think you get an infinite amount of custard and very little meat. If you take the old book by Dunning[xl]—I think that was the last recent book of that kind. Dunning you can still usefully consult if you want to know about the philosophy of some man; you get some solid information. I think it is nevertheless too ambitious but [. . .]

That could be done. But what I would do, if I were a teacher with some freedom, would be to give much more limited courses, because the young college teacher is himself a man who still has to learn while he teaches. That is true of course of every teacher, but it is more cruelly true of a college teacher, who sometimes perhaps has the feeling that what he knows about the subject could go on the back of a postage stamp [. . .][xli] One can make a course, say, on the Declaration of Independence, a very [. . .] subject in American colleges. Take the Declaration—and of course only the Preamble is[21] especially important—and give a close analysis, and not assuming from the outset what no one knows, that this was just some phrases which they used because they had to do it. Assume for one moment that Jefferson and the others meant something by these phrases, and try simply to understand what these statements imply. You can easily see then, and easily show your students that you have to read the *Second Treatise* of Locke really to understand it, because you know what is here presented as self-evident truth is not so self-evident; [it] needs some argument. And then you go to Locke. Locke leads you again quite naturally to Hooker. And that is a perfectly sufficient course. If you interpret[xlii] in one semester the Declaration of Independence, Locke's *Second Treatise*, and the first book of Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*, then you have learned something at the end of the semester, and your students will have learned

[xxxvii] The transcriber suggests that Strauss might have said "the path."
[xxxviii] In the transcript: "consciousness (?)"
[xxxix] The transcriber notes that there was a break in the tape at this point.
[xl] William Archibald Dunning, *A History of Political Theories, Ancient and Medieval* (New York: Macmillan,1902).
[xli] The transcriber notes: "A couple of sentences inaudible."
[xlii] In the transcript: "interpret (?)"

something. I see the necessity of having some vague overall [. . .] just as when you teach political history you like to have chronology, and look [at] just which other battle was made in the same period as another. You need it. That would be the textbook I have described. But that should not be the theme of the teaching; the students should read that at their convenience to give some further information.

And you can also make a similar course on the American Constitution, it seems to me. Take the *Federalist Papers* and[22] these crucial parts of Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*, chapter 6 . . . and in book 9, I believe, about federative government, the two crucial parts. And then sixth book of Polybius,[xliii] which is obviously the source for Montesquieu [. . .] In other words, and here I fully subscribe to the principle of our former Chancellor Hutchins[xliv] that the utopian education should consist almost exclusively of seminars, and not of lectures—I say "almost exclusively" because there is a reasonable demand sometimes for a coherent exposition, just to listen a bit. You know?

That would be two [. . .] suggestions which would I believe solve the problem of serious study and introduction to study leading to these things which is, it seems to me, insoluble by the survey course. The survey course, however good the intention may be, is temptation to [. . .] And I will say the "isms" course which I sketched or tried to sketch—of course I have [. . .] the problem of natural right quite naturally—I think is also a feasible course. And I have no doubt that there are other possibilities. But the principle, it seems to me, is to limit the mass; in other words, to have a very small[23] [number] of important books which are read, and they should be read very intensely. That's the only way I think for improving thinking on the fundamental matters which is available and for which no foundation money [or][24] any other gravy train is needed, only a bit of good will on the part, not of the individual instructor, who I know is helpless, but of the departments. If the political science departments would give that freedom to the instructor to construct his theory courses, his introductory courses, as he thinks most beneficial to his students and to him[self], then I think that could be done without a single cent more being paid for it. It would be dangerous to the textbook publishers, but they have other ways of satisfying . . .

Student: I want to ask a question about Nietzsche's political interest, namely, in what sense he considered himself a political philosopher [. . .]

LS: Yes, that is true and is not true. I would say that in this respect I believe there is no fundamental difference between Nietzsche and Plato. For both of them—I mean "poetic" I think is really misleading in the case of Nietzsche, but both were concerned primarily and fundamentally with philosophy, there's no doubt about that. There are statements in Nietzsche when he writes a political aphorism—you find an example, by the way, in the eighth chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil*, [where] he goes into a political issue at that time, the Jewish question in Germany. And at the end he says, or at the beginning of the next [aphorism]: Well, why do I talk about things which are of no concern to me, which don't affect me?[xlv] In other words, Nietzsche had a fundamental reservation against the whole social [. . .] there is no doubt about that. But for

[xliii] Polybius, *The Histories*.
[xliv] Robert Maynard Hutchins (1899-1977), president (1929-45) and chancellor (1945-51) of the University of Chicago, author of *The University of Utopia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).
[xlv] *BGE*, 251.

the same reason for which Plato, although he wanted only to see the ideas, was forced to go back to the cave, for the same reason, namely, the sense of [. . .] you can say a sense of responsibility, you can even say of philanthropy, love of mankind which induced both men to do that. Nietzsche made these remarks only to say ultimately the salvation does not depend on politics, just as Plato meant. But he knew that there can be a society—a tone of society, a condition of society—which would destroy all possibility of philosophers of the future.

Let me put it this way. In the moment Nietzsche spoke of philosophers of the future, *philosophers* of the future, he had to face the social issue. And can any man, I would say any man who is not lacking some humanity, help thinking about what is going to happen to the next generation or so? I mean, those who have children know that from their own experience. But even apart from that [. . .] does not presuppose a kind of—well, really a deficiency of a man, if he is completely insensitive [to] the coming generation and the coming generations. And although everyone in his senses knows that there are limits to all responsibility, one can't help thinking of that. "*Après nous le deluge*"[xlvi]—there is something wrong with that. That's too irresponsible. And I think that was [. . .] Nietzsche meant it very seriously [. . .] Of course there is no doubt [that] Nietzsche was not a Nazi and would have been the very first to run away from Germany and Hitler. There cannot be the slightest doubt about that, just as [. . .] went away from Germany, and Spengler, as you know, rebelled against Hitler too,[25] only [he] was too much respected by some Nazis and nothing could be done to him. That is clear. They must be extremely stupid or extremely wicked people who fell victim to that doctrine. But that doesn't do away with the fact that Nietzsche in an indirect way prepared the climate in which Nazism could grow. You see, you cannot write these sentences like "Christianity is the greatest disgrace in the history of mankind"—you can't do that without effecting some changes, I mean, in the mind. Even the Marxists didn't use this particular sentence. And you must [have] thought that those who were anticommunists or antisocialists had a channel of political right-wing extremism laid out for them: no question of means and of decent means any more. Nietzsche had prepared that. You can't write such sentences about the Homeric heroes, that they raped all the women and killed anyone they didn't like, and regard it fundamentally as a students' prank and presenting that: That's nice, that's good. Of course Nietzsche did not ultimately mean it that way; it was a part in a very long argument. But which reader considered that? But a certain indifference to certain simple rules of conduct was bred by that. If Nietzsche had only been a man like [. . .] or Hitler himself, that would have been uninteresting, but this man was one of the greatest writers which Germany had, one of its most imaginative and deepest thinkers, and all the great qualities of Nietzsche sanctified these terrible sentences. And that is what I mean by change of [. . .] It's a very indirect responsibility, but nevertheless I would say a responsibility, and to say nothing of the fact that [for] a man like Nietzsche, who claims, who demands [that] it is necessary to preserve religion at least for the nonphilosophers, writing such extremist and exaggerated attacks on the whole religious tradition is of course a self-defeating and absurd enterprise. Nietzsche himself fell victim to what he called the democratic method of communication. In a noisy, restless atmosphere, he himself wrote noisily and restlessly. That is doubtless an important part of that tragedy.[xlvii]

Oh, it is no longer very early, I see.

[xlvi] "After us the flood."

[xlvii] In the transcript: "tragedy (?)"

[1] Deleted “a given.”
[2] Deleted “of.”
[3] Deleted “except.”
[4] Deleted “made.”
[5] Deleted “, how can we reconcile that.”
[6] Deleted “there is,.”
[7] Deleted “is nevertheless.”
[8] Deleted “we”
[9] Deleted “you know”
[10] Deleted “eternal”
[11] Deleted “that.”
[12] Deleted “he.”
[13] Deleted “the third,.”
[14] Deleted “as.”
[15] Deleted “which.”
[16] Moved “are most important.”
[17] Deleted “in.”
[18] Deleted “that.”
[19] Moved “any man in his senses can do that.”
[20] Deleted “of.”
[21] Moved “there.”
[22] Deleted “taking.”
[23] Deleted “amount”
[24] Deleted “and.”
[25] Moved “he.”