

plain, recognizable stuff of politics and common life. His teaching and speech were a model in action of what he insisted on as a matter of theory: namely, "that social phenomena must be understood primarily in the way in which they come into sight in the perspective of the citizen or statesman." He acted always on his theoretical teaching, that one must "ascend from the phenomena, as primarily given, to their principles." He insisted always on careful attention to the surface of things as "the indispensable condition for progress toward the center." His life was instructed by his conviction that political things are the surface, the known-to-us, solid surface, from which the philosophic study of the whole must begin and to which it must return.

We may observe that it was this joy in political things, this openness to human things, that enabled the quiet scholar nurtured in the high European tradition to come so easily to terms with, to understand and enjoy, American politics and life. He enjoyed the power of American speech, like all ordinary speech, to capture bluntly but exactly the twists and turns of political life. He greatly enjoyed in his lectures making edifying references to Marshal Dillon, Doc, and Kitty, to Perry Mason, and, latterly, to Colombo, all of whose adventures he followed with pleasure. And he had a deep appreciation of the strength and decency of the fundamental American political institutions. This appreciation he expressed with memorable mildness and prudence at a special program arranged for him at the 1964 meetings of the American Political Science Association. Responding to questions that seemed to him excessively melancholy regarding the American polity, he said that he was "sanguine about liberal democracy in this country, more sanguine than are many of my young friends, because so long as it remains true to itself, philosophy remains possible."

Leo Strauss' lifelong devotion to philosophy will be remembered by his students in countless ways. But perhaps what will remain most in the mind's eye will be the picture of him, still young, quietly powerful, holding forth for long hours in his classes at the University of Chicago. During twenty years, in an imposing variety of courses, most devoted to single thinkers, many to a single work, and all proceeding by means of a painstaking explication of the text, Mr. Strauss captivated in successive generations many of the Chicago department's most promising students. No teacher of political science in our time attracted a greater or more devoted personal following. But this was something of a puzzle because no one could have wished less for a following on merely personal grounds, no teaching could have been more disdainful of sycophancy, and no one could have been more lacking in the "charisma" ordinarily cited to explain such attraction. Now much can be attributed to his erudition, the forcefulness of his views, his devotion to teaching and his generosity to students; but all this, being present in others, is insufficient to account for the unique degree of

his influence over students of such human variety and quality. What seems necessary to explain the phenomenon is this: In his small and modest person, he made visible to his admiring students and friends the power, purity, and beauty of the philosophic study of politics.

The devotion and fascination of his students was nothing more than his due. Grateful to have known the man, his students and friends grieve that he is no more.

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II.

Mr. Strauss's scholarly corpus consists at present of some eighty contributions to journals and thirteen books, of which three are collections of articles and two are the elaborations of material delivered on lectureships. Some of his books are available in translation in six European languages. Between 1930 (*Die Religionskritik Spinozas*) and 1958 (*Thoughts on Machiavelli*), most of his books were on the moderns; from 1964 to his death, his books were on the classic ancients. Known as he is for having inclined toward antiquity, it is worth noting that his studies of Spinoza, Hobbes, and Machiavelli, as well as *Natural Right and History*, appeared in roughly the first half of the period during which his books were being published. It was characteristic of his scholarship that he did not criticize, and most certainly did not dismiss, where he had not first given his careful attention. It appears also that he did not merely prefer antiquity but rather rediscovered it through an arduous process that evidently impressed him as an ascent.

Social science, and especially political science, knew Mr. Strauss as a severe and sometimes sharp critic. He came close to suggesting that the social sciences, through the abstraction from moral concern that accompanied the quest for scientific validity, were in danger of becoming irrelevant. In a famous remark in "An Epilogue" to *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics* (ed. Herbert J. Storing), Mr. Strauss asserted that the new political science was in the position of fiddling while Rome burned. He seems to have provided a forecast that social science has been blaming itself for not producing; he did not foresee how far his criticism would become the confession of the discipline.

Mr. Strauss has long been described as controversial, and in view of his thought could hardly have been described otherwise. To modernity he taught the claims of antiquity. In an era profoundly affected by the successes of science he kept alive deep reservations against the unreflective enlargement of that vast human enterprise. In an age overrun by the belief in history, he reminded of eternity. Where convention or culture was regarded as everything, he spoke of nature. Those who twisted nature into a license heard from him about propriety and convention. Ideologists harboring behind science were rebuked in the name of philosophy.

The presumptuous who appropriated the dignity of philosophy were admonished to look within and learn modesty. Above all, those who apotheosized the here and now were called to elevate the mind's eye and practice that form of forbearance or moderation that gazes without prejudice on every place and time.

Pursuing the last remark, it should be said that Mr. Strauss was regarded as controversial also because of his manner of reading and interpreting the texts that he studied. He declined to assume, from the outset, that in all ages and circumstances men wrote with the same freedom that is used now as a matter of course. It is worth noting that a dedication to historicism, to a belief in the radical difference between ages and places, has not always restrained scholars from denouncing as fanciful an approach to alien writings that insisted on the need to study them as having been fashioned in, if not by, circumstances unlike our own.

Emphasis on his achievements in the interpretation of texts is not misleading, for much of his scholarship consisted of clarification of the history or tradition of political philosophy through what has come to be called "careful reading." The question arises reasonably enough whether the history of political philosophy is itself philosophic; and it arises with especial force when the interpretation of that history leads away from philosophy of history altogether, thus depriving the history as such of a peculiar philosophic gravity. The question deserves to be faced.

Mr. Strauss' work has shown effectively what interpretation aims at. It aspires to resemble the immersion of a dry root in water rather than the grafting of a scion onto alien stock: the text acquires at best the fulness that belonged to it implicitly and that it must achieve in the reader's thought before it can be said to have reached its own completion. Always the possibility exists that the author of the text has expressed his thought not only explicitly but

through a reticence, and the interpreter must therefore be alert both to what is present simply and to what is present in the mode of a void, without tenuous, arbitrary, or tendentious selections out of the infinite field of the absent. In brief, the mind of the interpreter must be at the same time passive to the initiative of the author and active in bringing to the text a richly furnished scholarly and human experience.

Interpretation that intrudes nothing extraneous into the economy of the text but that supplies the text with an amplitude drawn from the same material as that of which the text is fashioned might be rare, but surely is philosophic. And so far as the philosophic activity itself consists of the collaboration of passivity and activity in relation to a world, interpretation is not the instrument but the emulative copartner in the theoretical activity proper.

It is easy to recognize Mr. Strauss' stature and impossible to foretell his influence. He left an unknowable number of followers on several continents, but the sense in which he left a school is problematic. The term "Straussians" is at present much more common than "Straussism." Certainly he did not open up the thought of classical antiquity without projecting the content of that thought, nor did he contrast antiquity and modernity with an indecisive mind on the great issues of nature, the whole, and the ground of the human good. He proclaimed a conception that the world considers obsolete but that yet exhibits, partly because of him, some of the signs of immortality through the veil of presumed moribundity.

The world that Mr. Strauss taught, provoked, and sometimes offended is poorer now that he is gone. The ones who knew him and his care take leave of him with a sorrow I cannot express.

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