Willmoore Kendall

Maverick of American Conservatives

Edited by
John A. Murley and John E. Alvis

With a foreword by William F. Buckley, Jr.

CLOAKED IN VIRTUE

UNVEILING LEO STRAUSS AND THE RHETORIC OF [M]ERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

[N]ICHOLAS XENOS

Foundation grant to pursue research on Thomas Hobbes in Paris and England. From a fortuitous exile, Strauss was able to learn from correspondents of the sequence of events that followed: the burning of the Reichstag on February 27, the emergency laws enacted the next day that abolished basic rights and protections, the anti-Jewish legislation passed on April 1 and the ensuing boycott of Jewish businesses and professionals. By late spring, Strauss was joined by thousands of German Jews seeking refuge. He may have been unaware that his erstwhile teacher Martin Heidegger and his recent interlocutor, the jurist Carl Schmitt, who had written a letter in support of Strauss's Rockefeller application, both joined the Nazi party on May 1.[49]

On May 19, 1933, Strauss wrote a letter to his friend, the philosopher Karl Löwith, reporting on his situation in Paris. Referring to the German intellectuals who had taken refuge or, like Walter Benjamin, were already residing there, Strauss ironically remarks that, "The 'competition' is certainly very great: the entire German-Jewish intellectual proletariat finds itself here. It's terrible—I'd really rather run off to Germany." However, "here lies the snag [literally: "here lies the hook," *Haken*]. Strauss continues:

> Admittedly, I cannot simply "opt" for another country [*Land*]—one does not choose a homeland [*Heimat*] and, most importantly, a mother tongue. I certainly will never be *able* to write anything but German, even though I will *have* to write in another language. On the other hand, I see no acceptable possibility of living under the swastika [*Hakenkreuz*]; that is to say, under a symbol that says to me nothing but: you and your kind, you are all by nature subhuman [φυσει *Untermenschen*] and therefore true pariahs. There is but *one* solution. We must always repeat to ourselves: we "men of science"—so our brethren called themselves in the Arab Middle Ages—non habemus locum manentem, sed quaerimus [we do not have a fixed place, but we are searching for it] . . . And, as far as *that* is concerned, that the Germany of the Right does not tolerate us absolutely does not follow from the principles of the Right. On the contrary: only from the principles of the Right, from the fascist, authoritarian, *imperialist* principles, can one protest against the dreadful state of affairs. I read Caesar's Commentaries with deeper understanding and I think of Virgil's: Tu regere imperio . . . parcere subjectis et debellare superbos [to rule the peoples . . . to spare the conquered and subdue the proud].[50] There is no reason to grovel before crosses [*Kreuze*], even the cross of liberalism, as long as somewhere in the world a spark of *Roman* thought still glows. And even then: rather the Ghetto than any cross [*lieber als jegliches Kreuz das Ghetto*].[51]

This letter represents one of Leo Strauss's few direct statements of a discernibly political nature. And yet scholars and others who have written

on Strauss, his political positions, or his influence have largely ignored it.[52] Perhaps tellingly, the publication of a selection of Strauss's correspondence with Löwith in English translation, in a journal associated with the Straussian school, began with letters dating from December 1935 rather than with their first exchanges in 1932.[53]

Strauss's reaction to the Nazi takeover has its origins in his critique of modernity as the triumph of what he, in conformity with German political discourse of the time, called liberalism and its attendant principle of universal individual rights and equality. That critique was grounded in the realization that the extension of such rights to Jews had had the effect of threatening Jewish collective identity, on the one hand, and encouraging anti-Semitism in the face of Jewish cultural difference, on the other. Strauss searched for an answer to this threat in a return to pre-Enlightenment Jewish writers such as Maimonides while at the same time displaying an interest in contemporary proponents of cultural-national identity on the European right. These included German figures such as Paul de Lagarde and the French writer Charles Maurras, one of the intellectual founders of the proto-fascist Action Française.[54] In this context, Strauss's letter to Löwith reflects his understanding that a properly fascist movement such as the Italian one was to be distinguished from National Socialism by the absence of a racial component (as opposed to a national one) and its promotion of a premodern corporatist social program.[55] This was apparently a formula for reconstituting Jewish communities in subordinate but protected pre-Enlightenment, imperial form (i.e., "to spare the conquered"). The emphatic character of Strauss's letter thus points to the depth of his reactionary political instincts and antagonism to liberal modernity. Unraveling the intellectual and political meaning of this letter and its place within the larger structure of Leo Strauss's thought will be the purpose of the ensuing chapters.

> who ascribed to Plato the view that in the Greek city the philosopher was in grave danger. In making this statement, he merely repeated what Plato himself had said. To a considerable extent, the danger was averted by the art of Plato, as Farabi likewise noted. But the success of Plato must not blind us to the existence of a danger which, however much its forms may vary, is coeval with philosophy.
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> (*PAW*, 21)

Strauss's "discovery" of this art of writing, and the chronology in which its emergence in his work occurs, raises several important questions and it has been extensively debated. But that debate has served to obscure rather than clarify the nature of Strauss's political thought in his German period. As a general observation, it is easily conceded that some writers have engaged in the practice of esoteric writing. The difficulty becomes one of identifying which writers in which specific situations. The more controversial issues revolve around the specific claim regarding philosophy and opinion and the deep antagonism latent in the relationship between the philosopher and society, a relationship that must be mediated by strategies of deception. Perhaps more controversial still, Strauss's "discovery" raises the question whether or not he himself engaged in such an art of writing and consequently also the question of how to read him. These questions must be supplemented by the acknowledgment that Strauss's recounting of his writings in Germany during these decades were given after many years residing and teaching in the United States and with a posteriori knowledge of the fate of German Jews. The change of environment within which Strauss wrote is itself relevant to the question of how to read these accounts. They may therefore be read as adaptations to an entirely different political and cultural context from those upon which he is reflecting and as containing a certain amount of foreshadowing. Independently of the issue of their possible esotericism, therefore, there is ample reason for caution in accepting Strauss's accounts in his own terms.

My claim is that Strauss's political views remained roughly unchanged from the 1930s on. Those views were deeply antithetical to what he saw as the Enlightenment doctrines underlying liberalism and democracy. What did change were two things: following his engagement with Carl Schmitt's *Concept of the Political*, Strauss was able to focus his already formed political position on the concept of nature, including human nature; and secondly, the social and political context in which he found himself. Those changes are refracted through Strauss's political rhetoric. It seems clear enough that Strauss at some point adopted the view of philosophy that he ascribes to esoteric writers, of philosophy as the quest for truth of "all things," and therefore that we should expect him, at the very least, to practice prudence in his public writings, especially once he had drawn attention to this view. But it is just as likely that this view of philosophy

was adopted, at least in part, to accord with his already formed, self-consciously heterodox political position, which he sought to shield by, and mediate through, this view of philosophy. The autobiographical 1965 preface presumptively meets the criterion of prudential writing, though many commentators fail to systematically take this into account when basing their treatment of Strauss's European period on his own testimony.[14] But while there is a presumptive doubt about the veracity of this testimony, the chronology I have established above indicates that there is no reason to assume that Strauss was engaged in hiding his views beneath a veil before his emigration to the United States, even though he had "discovered" esotericism at least as early as 1931. So what follows will be an intertwined process of recovering Strauss's political position in Germany and uncovering what is veiled in his subsequent autobiographical accounts.

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After his declaration in the 1965 preface regarding the "theologico-political predicament" in which he found himself when writing his book on Spinoza, Strauss goes on to claim that, "At that time Germany was a liberal democracy. The regime was known as the Weimar Republic" (*PSCR*, 1). These innocuous sounding statements are actually freighted with meaning. To refer to the Weimar Republic as a liberal democracy is almost a commonplace in contemporary terms, but its meaning in the context of Strauss's position in the 1920s is not transparent. Strauss apparently did not use the locution "liberal democracy" in his published writings during the period in question.[15] Recalling that Strauss's review essay on Carl Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* was included in the same volume as the preface, it is instructive to note that Schmitt clearly distinguished liberalism from democracy in that text and others.[16] Schmitt associates liberalism with individualism, which, with its insistence upon the priority of personal freedom, results in a consistent depoliticization of society and emphasis instead upon economic and social matters. Private law, morality, and economic concerns are the stuff of liberalism. Democracy, by contrast, is understood as entailing a thoroughgoing egalitarianism and collectivism, a trend Schmitt sees as leading toward the realization of the total state. By blurring the lines between state and society, democracy thus represents a tendency opposed to liberalism's separation of spheres.[17] In the body of his text on Spinoza, in fact, Strauss explicitly recognizes that liberalism and democracy are distinct by distinguishing between liberal and democratic elements in Spinoza's political theory (*SCR*, 243). Indeed, later in the preface itself, in a formulation absent in its precise form from the book that follows, he says of Spinoza that his political theory differs from classical republicanism insofar as "the republic which he favors is a liberal democracy. He was the first philosopher who was both a democrat and a liberal. He was the philosopher

be foundational American principles while he has laid the dynamite carefully between the lines.

* * *

Judging "influence" is a tricky game. I have described what I called the Straussian network in chapter 1 and have given my account of Strauss's political theory in subsequent chapters. In what remains, I will track one strand of what can plausibly be considered a direct influence Strauss's thought has had on the substance and rhetoric of American foreign policy as developed and defended by a specific group of intellectuals, all of whom have been identified as so-called neoconservatives. I do not claim that all elements of neoconservative ideology are traceable to Strauss. I will focus here solely on the theme of nihilism that is so prominent in *Natural Right and History* and the role that that theme has assumed within the body of ideas associated with neoconservatism.

* * *

Whenever a definition of neoconservatism is needed, Irving Kristol can be relied upon to deliver one, while at the same time professing insecurity as to whether or not the term has any meaning. In 2003, in an article published in *The Weekly Standard*, edited by his son William, the elder Kristol decided that neoconservatism constitutes a "persuasion" rather than a movement. This persuasion, he claimed, has as its "historical task and political purpose" to "convert the Republican party, and American conservatism in general, against their respective wills, into a new kind of conservative politics suitable to governing a modern democracy. That this new conservative politics is distinctly American is beyond doubt." Though by no means dominant within the Republican party, it is neoconservative policies, Kristol argued, that must be credited with the popular success of Republican presidents.[17]

What is this new, peculiarly American form designed to govern a "modern democracy"? Kristol emphasizes its "hopeful," "forward-looking," and "cheerful" qualities that apparently mark it as in "the 'American grain'." He links it to the two Roosevelts and Ronald Reagan rather than Coolidge, Hoover, Eisenhower, and Goldwater, the latter group curiously expunged from the "American grain." Neocons support tax cuts as the engine of economic growth, tolerating budget deficits when necessary, because only such growth gives "modern democracies their legitimacy and durability." "It is a basic assumption of neoconservatism," he writes, "that, as a consequence of the spread of affluence among all classes, a property-owning and tax-paying population will, in time, become less vulnerable to egalitarian

illusions and demagogic appeals and more sensible about the fundamentals of economic reckoning." And while neoconservatives "do not like the concentration of services in the welfare state and are happy to study alternative ways of delivering these services," they do not oppose a strong state. Neocons are inspired by Tocqueville's "democratic wisdom" in regard to the state.

If the state is not providing "welfare services," then whither its strength? These are concentrated in two areas. The first is the area of "culture." Neocons support government action to address "the steady decline in our democratic culture" in the areas of education, "the relations of church and state, the regulation of pornography, and the like." These policies unite neocons to traditional conservatives as well as "religious traditionalists."

The second area is of course foreign policy. Mirroring his notion that neoconservatism is not a movement but a persuasion, Kristol claims that while the neocon influence on foreign policy has gotten the greatest share of media attention, it is surprising because "there is no set of neoconservative beliefs concerning foreign policy, only a set of attitudes derived from historical experience." (He then notes that, thanks to the influence of Leo Strauss and Donald Kagan, Thucydides is "the favorite neoconservative text on foreign affairs.") The "attitudes" consist of the claim that "patriotism is a natural and healthy sentiment," world government can lead to world tyranny, the view that "statesmen should, above all, have the ability to distinguish friends from enemies," and, finally, for a great power "whose identity is ideological," such as the United States, national interest is "not a geographical term" and entails "ideological interests in addition to more material concerns."

Kristol's description of neoconservatives is vacuous, but illuminating just the same. Illuminating in its vacuity, in fact. His account itself cuts against the "American grain" it claims to describe. Tocqueville, a problematical ally in any event, brought a European, if not distinctly French, perspective to bear on the American democracy of the 1830s. And Thucydides? But there is more. Leo Strauss, who, we remember, emigrated to the United States in 1937, aged thirty-eight, brought with him from Germany a distinctly European *Weltanschauung*, which included the concern with world government and its resultant "tyranny," as well as perhaps less obvious notions that underlay Kristol's account but may now be apparent. And finally, the necessity of distinguishing friend from enemy as a fundamental attribute of the statesman is immediately recognizable as one of the core concepts—indeed, the core concept of "the political"—bequeathed by the German jurist and political theorist Carl Schmitt. Schmitt, of course, became a high official in the National Socialist state. That distasteful fact may account for Kristol's reluctance to name names in Schmitt's case, but the hardly "American" intonation remains.

The nativity of Kristol's rendition of neoconservatism can be set aside for the moment; its rhetorical function will become evident. A more historical

genealogy would go something like this. Neoconservatism was originally used to describe an amorphous group of political journalists, such as Irving Kristol, and social theorists, such as Daniel Bell, who had identified with the Left, often with the Trotskyist Left, in their earlier days but moved to the Right due to a conflation of three factors. The first of these was their anti-Soviet Cold War stance, a position these figures then shared with the anticommunist liberals around such journals as *Encounter*, co-founded by Kristol and the English poet Stephen Spender, and Norman Podhoretz's *Commentary*. The second and third factors are more closely related and crucial to their emerging worldview. These are a reaction to the so-called cultural revolution of the 1960s and to the welfare state. Together, these phenomena were taken to constitute a crisis of values well described in the title of Bell's important book, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, where Bell argued that the very affluence produced by capitalist economies and redistributed through welfare provisions threatened to undermine the ethic of deferred gratification that formed capitalism's disciplined core. A culture of consumption, fueled by advertising and raising pleasure to the highest rung of individual and collective pursuit, thus endangered the social system itself.[18]

Various of the future neocons took opposing positions on the Vietnam War and many of them identified with the Democratic Party into the 1960s, at least until the nomination of George McGovern in 1972. (Most of the neocons who remained in the Democratic ranks, such as Ben Wattenberg, Richard Perle, Jeane Kirkpatrick, and Elliot Abrams, were in the Henry "Scoop" Jackson camp that combined a liberal domestic policy with a hawkish foreign one.) It was the rise of the New Left and the cultural politics they associated with it that appalled the likes of Kristol & Co. The French journalists Alain Frachon and Daniel Vernet, in a recent book on the neocons, quote an unidentified member of the persuasion as saying that they wanted "to rebel against the rebellion of the sixties."[19] Frachon and Vernet, focused on the "messianism" underlying neoconservative foreign policy, emphasize the harsh tone of the New Left's politics, its denunciation of America as a racist, imperialist, and violent country, and the reaction to it by a group consisting mostly of the sons and daughters of Jewish and Irish immigrants. They quote Wattenberg, for example, as telling them that he responded to the New Left's "declinism" with "an immigrant's optimism," and "historical optimism," they write, "is a very neoconservative quality."[20]

Irving Kristol's emphasis on the cheerful optimism of the neoconservative persuasion echoes in this reaction to "declinism." Whatever criticisms the neocons might have of domestic and foreign policies were balanced with an embrace of the possibilities of American power. But this optimism is in apparent tension with the neoconservatives' own analysis of democratic cultural decline, the beginnings of which they associate not so much with the New Left's political critique as with the cultural radicalism of the 1960s.

Kristol's wife, the historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, in an article published in *The Public Interest* in 1998, referred to problems besetting "our democratic society" as "diseases" of a moral and cultural nature rather than political ones: "the collapse of ethical principles and habits, the loss of respect for authorities and institutions, the breakdown of the family, the decline of civility, the vulgarization of high culture, and the degradation of popular culture."[21] She characterizes the "virus" that produced this disease as "the ethical and cultural relativism that reduces all values, all standards, and all authority to expressions of personal will and inclination," making it clear that "the counterculture of yesteryear is the dominant culture today." And she invokes the usual initiators of this virus by citing elites in the universities and media.

To the extent that the neoconservative persuasion can be said to have managed its dialectic of cultural decline and political optimism it has done so by an elaborate rhetorical construction. The elements of that construction can be glimpsed in the recent accounting of what went wrong in the post-9/11 world presented by Francis Fukuyama, the self-styled apostate neoconservative. Fukuyama announces his departure from the fold in *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy*. In a sign that Irving Kristol's insistence on an American heritage is not peculiar to him, Fukuyama also claims that, "the key principles of neoconservativism as they developed from the mid-twentieth century to the present are deeply rooted in a variety of American traditions."[22] Fukuyama delineates four strands to this tradition, the first being the morphing of pre-war Trotskyites into post-war anticommunists. A second, related, strand he locates in the founding of *The Public Interest* in 1965, which focused on domestic policy and which quickly became a line of resistance against the welfare-statism of the New Left, on the one hand, and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, on the other. The legacy of Leo Strauss forms the third strand, though Fukuyama is at pains to argue that Straussianism had little influence on the mindset that led to the Iraq war. "More nonsense," he writes, "has been written about Leo Strauss and the Iraq war than on virtually any other subject."[23] Far more important with regard to specific foreign policy ideas was the fourth strand descending from the theorist of so-called second-strike nuclear capability, Albert Wohlstetter. Wohlstetter's advocacy of military strategy taking precision targeting of nuclear and conventional weapons into account reverberates in former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's advocacy of a lighter, more mobile military, an "instrument" that makes military intervention more attractive. And Wohlstetter shared with Strauss one overlapping concern that did contribute to neoconservative foreign policy in general and Iraq in particular. Wohlstetter shared with the Straussians a belief "born out of a distrust of the Soviet Union that regimes mattered to foreign policy."[24]

"Regime," we know, is a Straussian term of art that refers to the way of life that sustains particular political institutions. It is the central term in

Fukuyama's reading of Strauss and reveals more about Straussianism and its central place within neoconservatism than he realizes. Fukuyama notes in his book's preface that, "I was a student of Allan Bloom, himself a student of Leo Strauss and the author of *The Closing of the American Mind*" by way of establishing his intellectual links with this strand of neoconservative thought.[25] That lineage is important, because it links three books that are central to understanding the place that Straussianism has assumed within neoconservatism: Strauss's *Natural Right and History*, Alan Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind*, and Fukuyama's own bestseller, *The End of History and the Last Man*.

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Two surprisingly successful books appeared in 1987 that bear directly on the twinning of political optimism and cultural decline. One was Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Decline of the Great Powers*. Kennedy argued that the history of great powers showed a pattern of overstretching military commitments that ultimately led to decline because their military requirements placed impossible burdens on their economies. America, he thought, was on the verge of a similar fate. With the book's unexpected popularity, the Reagan administration began a public campaign to rebut the notion that the US should cut back on its military bases abroad.[26]

The second of those 1987 books was Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*. While Kennedy provided the impetus to a rebuttal, to an affirmation of America's global power, Bloom provided the rhetorical armature for the neoconservative cultural discourse that has also proved so politically effective.[27] Coming as it did toward the end of the Reagan presidency, Bloom's book should be seen as a consolidation of already prominent misgivings about the cultural landscape of post-1960s America rather than as a creator of them. Indeed, the book's fantastic success indicates that the audience was already primed for a high-minded diatribe aimed at the state of the "souls" of the nation's youth. What caught the attention of this public was perhaps less the opening salvo directed at the belief that truth is relative, the one certainty Bloom professed to discover in his students, than the attack on rock music and popular culture in general that followed. Here Bloom's sardonic, titillating style showed itself in full bloom. He imagines a teen-age boy doing his homework while wearing headphones or watching MTV, and what does Bloom see in this, his own fantasy? He sees this boy as the inheritor of the progress bequeathed by philosophy and heroism and science: "A pubescent child whose body throbs with orgasmic rhythms; whose feelings are made articulate in hymns to the joys of onanism or the killing of parents; whose ambition is to win fame and wealth in imitating the drag-queen who makes the music. In short, life is made into

a nonstop, commercially prepackaged masturbational fantasy."[28] In this sort of language, as one of Bloom's critics on the Right, Harry V. Jaffa, pointed out, there is "a great deal of prurient denunciation of immorality."[29] And no doubt at least part of the book's success can be thus accounted for.

But the flamboyance and prurience of the book's opening sections, with their emphasis on culture, served, perhaps purposely, to obscure the denser argument concerning philosophy and politics later on in the book, and in particular its theoretical, as opposed to polemical, claims regarding nihilism.

A number of persons are mentioned only once in Bloom's book, including Buddha, Margaret Dumont, who played Groucho's matronly amour in Marx Brothers movies, Michael Jackson, and Pericles. Carl Schmitt is another. Bloom quotes Schmitt, who is unidentified except for his name, as proclaiming, "Today Hegel died in Germany" on the day of Hitler's assumption of power. Bloom wants his readers to think that this denotes the death of the German university, since "Hegel was arguably the greatest university man there ever was," but Schmitt was no Hegelian and in fact joined the Nazi party three months later, an event and an association Bloom manages not to mention.[30]

But, as many reviewers observed at the time, the most notable notable among the single-referenced is Leo Strauss. When Bloom descries the superficiality of contemporary American nihilism, he calls it "nihilism with a happy ending" or "nihilism without the abyss," to distinguish it from its Old World version.[31] The light-hearted language of "value judgments," he claims, can be attributed primarily to the books of Max Weber and Sigmund Freud taught by the university professors of the post-war period who were themselves either German or had studied in Germany or with the émigré German professors. These professors repressed the "darker side" of Weber and Freud, namely the debt each owed to Nietzsche. The irony here, of course, is that Bloom's professor was the German émigré Leo Strauss, who did not repress the dark side.

While Kristol gladly mentions Strauss as a teacher and inspiration, Bloom's ironic omission is characteristic of a certain obfuscation that one frequently encounters in accounts of Strauss's German period including his own, as we have seen. An example of the former is Fukuyama's assertion that,

> Leo Strauss was a German Jewish political theorist who studied under Ernst Cassirer and who, fleeing the Nazis, emigrated to the United States in the 1930s and taught mostly at the University of Chicago until shortly before his death in 1973. Much of his work can be seen as a response to Nietzsche and Heidegger, who had undermined the rationalist tradition of Western philosophy from within and left modernity without a deep philosophical grounding for its own beliefs and institutions.[32]

It is true that Strauss did his doctoral work in philosophy under Cassirer's direction, but he was so little influenced by him that, in the autobiographical account he gave at St. John's College in 1970, Strauss did not even mention him. Instead, Strauss emphasized the impact of Heidegger, whose lectures he attended in the mid-1920s. As a result of what he heard in Heidegger's lectures, Strauss says he remarked at the time that, "compared to Heidegger, Max Weber, till then regarded by me as the incarnation of the spirit of science and scholarship, was an orphan child."[33] Fukuyama's undoubtedly intentional distorted representation is meant to obscure Strauss' deep-seated anti-Enlightenment sentiments. While it is certainly true that Strauss was in some sense "responding" to Nietzsche and Heidegger, the nature of that response is very much in question.

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In his essay largely devoted to insulating Strauss from the use some Straussians and others have made of him, Mark Lilla emphasizes the long-term impact of *Natural Right and History*. The crucial date in assessing that impact is 1968. The upheavals within American universities that began in earnest in that year had a traumatic effect on many of Strauss's current and former students, he writes. Thanks to *Natural Right and History*, they were "prepared to see the threat of 'nihilism' lurking in the interstices of modern life, waiting to be released, turning America into Weimar."[34] This premise, Lilla notes, underlay Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind*. Illustrating Lilla's point, Bloom there uses Louis Armstrong's popularization of the Brecht–Weill song, "Mack the Knife," as a sign of the "astonishing Americanization of the German pathos." Bloom links the song's concept to Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and to the "supra-moral attitude of expectancy" that "appealed to Weimar and its American admirers." Its American version becomes "less dangerous, although not less corrupt." "Our stars," he continues, "are singing a song they do not understand, translated from a German original and having a huge popular success with unknown but wide-ranging consequences, as something of the original message touches something in American souls. But behind it all, the master lyricists are Nietzsche and Heidegger."[35]

Bloom's one mention of Strauss comes at the end of a section of several pages in which he largely reiterates his teacher's teaching about Locke. Hobbes, Bloom says, invented the notion of rights and Locke gave it respectability. Rights, to an American, "are our common sense. Right is not the opposite of wrong, but of duty. It is a part of, or the essence of, freedom. It begins from man's cherished passion to live, and to live as painlessly as possible." Rights represent "a new kind of morality solidly grounded in self-interest."[36] The irony with which Bloom articulates these points was likely lost on many readers. However, against the background of Strauss's *Natural*

Right and History, Bloom's paragraph that begins with "Americans are Lockeans" and ends with the sentence, "As Leo Strauss put it, the moderns 'built on low but solid ground,'" displays its fully ironic sense.[37] But aside from the Straussians among them, the neoconservatives largely ignored the irony and figures such as William Bennett generated and exploited Bloom's commercial success, mindlessly jumbling Plato and Locke, Socrates and Jefferson together while failing to see the worst of Nietzsche threading his way through Bloom's glib and unreasoned pronouncements. It made for attention-grabbing headlines and initiated a largely vacuous but politically astute "debate" on cultural values that proceeded on terms set by the neocons.

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It was one of Bloom's students who managed to synthesize various elements of the Straussian liturgy into a useful neoconservative sermon on history and politics. Francis Fukuyama's principal contribution to neoconservative political theory is his much-discussed 1992 book, *The End of History and the Last Man*. In it, Fukuyama beats the Weberian horse one more time. "While Max Weber," he writes, "took a despairing and pessimistic view of the increasing rationalism and secularism of mankind's historical 'progress,' postwar modernization theory gave his ideas a decidedly optimistic and, one is tempted to say, typically American cast."[38] But Fukuyama's text represents a skillful sublimation of the European and American, despairing and optimistic motifs. Whereas Strauss dwelt upon what he saw as the disastrous effects of modern science and technology, Fukuyama emphasizes two social aspects of their development: technology allows for advances in military strength and in economic capacity. Thus science provides the means for people "to gratify their desire for security, and for the limitless acquisition of material goods."[39] Security and the accumulation of wealth are the foundations of the modern notion of right examined and ultimately rejected by Strauss. Fukuyama highlights the limitations of this notion of right, but with a more strategic view toward its needed supplement in the present historical period.

Fukuyama discusses Hobbes and Locke under the rubric of "the first man," focusing on their conceptions of the so-called state of nature.[40] His purpose is to contrast the safety-seeking, acquisitive, rights-bearing liberal individual of Locke with the individual who seeks recognition above all else. Fukuyama derives this "first man" from Hegel's depiction of the struggle for recognition in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a struggle that results in the establishment of masters and slaves. The master-type is able to overcome the natural fear of death and risk everything in the struggle, while the slave-type ultimately clings to life. Thus Locke's individual is the type of the slave, who puts the desire for self-preservation first. And Fukuyama, notes,

"Thomas Jefferson's 'self-evident' truths about the rights of men to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were not essentially different from Locke's natural rights to life and property." The problem for politics was seen by Locke, Jefferson, and others like them, Fukuyama says, "as being in some sense the effort to persuade the would-be masters to accept the life of the slave in a kind of classless society of slaves."[41]

The "first man" of the liberal imagination is at the same time the "last man" of Fukuyama's title. While he emphasizes his reading of Hegel, as mediated by Alexandre Kojève, Fukuyama's larger conception of recognition is indebted to Bloom's idiosyncratic interpretation and translation of Plato's *Republic*.[42] The crucial notion here is that there is a part of the soul that is characterized by "spiritedness" (*thymos*) that drives individuals to seek recognition. It is a passion and distinct from desire. The Lockean individual elevates desire for self-preservation and material comfort over this passion. Figuratively, Fukuyama characterizes this, insofar as it is successful, as the victory of the bourgeois over the aristocrat.[43] Nietzsche called the victor the "last man" in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and described him as an unself-reflective, small man who "makes everything small" while proclaiming himself the inventor of "happiness."[44] The success of science, technology, and liberal democracy, a society of "slaves," poses the problem of the last man for Fukuyama, as it did for Strauss in his response to Kojève.

Liberal democracy is understood by Fukuyama to be the only long-term political option in the world after the collapse of the Soviet empire. In the short term, forms of authoritarian rule may prevail, but liberal democracy is the only system that provides the possibility of the universal recognition that will increasingly be demanded as education levels increase in accordance with technological (including military and economic) advances. These latter are inevitable, given the processes of globalization. But despite this assertion, Fukuyama's analysis is plagued by the specter of the last man. "Liberal principles," he writes, "can be destructive of the highest forms of patriotism which are necessary for the very survival of the community. For it is a widely recognized defect of Anglo-Saxon liberal theory that men would never die for a country based merely on the principle of rational self-preservation."[45] Liberal democracy requires irrational passions to sustain it. The "noble" features of Strauss's critique of modernity return. And so does the troubling specter of the nihilist redemption of humanity.

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In an influential article published in 1996 in *Foreign Affairs*, William Kristol and Robert Kagan drew the consequences of the preceding trajectory of thought from Strauss to Fukuyama. They claimed that American military officers worried that "while they serve as a kind of foreign legion, doing the hard work of American-style 'empire management,' American civilians at

home, preoccupied with the distribution of tax breaks and government benefits, will not come to their support when the going gets tough."[46] So they called for greater "moral clarity" in American foreign policy by promoting the "American principles" of "democracy, free markets, respect for liberty."[47] Then they drew the connection: "The remoralization of America at home ultimately requires the remoralization of American foreign policy."[48] The Straussian element in the neoconservative agenda thus contributed to a political project that aimed at exploiting America's unrivalled global military power in order to reverse its cultural decline. The regime it sought to alter was the American regime. 9/11 presented the opportunity to enact this noble delusion.

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Fukuyama's fear of the universal and homogeneous state becoming a reality in the post-Cold War era has presumably been abated, at least for now, by the discovery of a new opponent with universal aspirations in "fundamentalist" Islam. This new opponent has a usefully polymorphous character, appearing now simply as "terrorists" or "evil-doers" when needed and not requiring too much in the way of knowledge in order to observe it lurking about. It is ironic that those among the policy makers who count Leo Strauss as an influence on their think-tank or government resumés should be so ignorant in this regard, given Strauss's love and respect for the rationalism of medieval Islamic philosophy and his deep knowledge of Arabic. But Strauss would still undoubtedly consider those who govern our half of the divide as "not wise" in any event. And though much is unclear about this polymorphous opponent, it is unlikely that it is predicated on a view of human nature that gives excessive scope to the passions. But still, an opportunity has been given to those who will exploit it to strengthen imperial power, "to rule the peoples . . . to spare the conquered and subdue the proud." And that, after all, was Strauss's point.