

We have no higher duty, and no more pressing duty, than to remind ourselves and our students, of political greatness, human greatness, of the peaks of human excellence. We are supposed to train ourselves and others in seeing things as they are, and this means above all in seeing their greatness and their misery, their excellence and their vileness, their nobility and their triumphs, and therefore never to mistake mediocrity, however brilliant, for true greatness.

—Leo Strauss, eulogy of Winston Churchill, January 25, 1965

Harry Jaffa has written and said many beautiful things in a long lifetime of scholarship and teaching. Among the most beautiful have been his expressions of reverence and gratitude for his teacher, Leo Strauss. He credits Strauss with giving him a gift dearer than life itself. Strauss taught him what to do with his life—he brought Jaffa to reason. When the young Jaffa's mind, unbeknownst to itself, was in the grips of the historicism and relativism that remain the conventional wisdom of our time, Strauss's teaching "struck off [his] shackles," turned him from his illusions, and dragged him up from the cave of nihilism to the light of natural right.

Jaffa's reverence for his teacher is made possible by the greater reverence his teacher taught him to have for truth. In the service of this greater reverence, Jaffa has spent a fair portion of his life arguing with those intellectually closest to him—not least among them, himself. A friend recently gave me a copy of *Crisis of the House Divided*, on the cover page of which Jaffa had written in pencil half a century ago, "For Willmoore Kendall who knows that *amicus quidem Socrates amior veritas*." Jaffa used to argue to the knife with Kendall about the character of the American founding and the significance of Abraham Lincoln, late into the night on long distance telephone from Claremont to Dallas. When he later disagreed with himself on these questions, as he did most notably in his two great works—*Crisis of the House Divided* and *A New Birth of Freedom*—he might be forgiven for thinking the pursuit of truth had brought him up against an even more formidable opponent. It is that wide ranging pursuit that gave rise to the disputations collected in this volume.

One of the common criticisms of Jaffa is that he takes politics and morality more seriously than philosophic minds would do; that he shows a regard for America in particular that no philosophic mind would show for any earthly regime; that he shows more regard for America than

## TWO

# Leo Strauss Remembered

Our purpose here is to honor the memory of Leo Strauss.<sup>1</sup> It is fitting that we should do so. But honor depends upon the competence—if not the virtue—of those who give it, as well as upon the excellence of him who is to receive it. A great man once said of his teacher that he was such a one as bad men had no right even to praise. We cannot admit a doubt of our own wisdom without casting one as well upon him whom we would honor. Still, no one would have insisted more rigorously upon the necessity of both doubts than Leo Strauss.

Willmoore Kendall called Strauss the greatest teacher of politics since Machiavelli. I do not think that we—or at least I—know enough about politics to know who was its greatest teacher, either before or after Machiavelli. But I think I know what Kendall meant by that assertion, and why it is eminently plausible. For it was Strauss who, in a long series of works, culminating in *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, laid bare the Machiavellian roots of modernity and of the specific teachings of the great moderns. With very few even apparent exceptions, Strauss proved beyond a reasonable doubt that the great political philosophers after Machiavelli—for example Spinoza, Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx—were all, in the decisive respects, disciples of Machiavelli. All of them attempted in their doctrines to guarantee the actualization of a certain kind of just or legitimate regime, by taking their bearings, not by that regime which is everywhere best, but by what all men actually everywhere are. They tried to assure the fulfillment of the goal of political life by lowering that goal.

Kendall rightly observed that Strauss would not have been able to penetrate the Machiavellian origins of modernity, had he not himself transcended those origins. Machiavelli had denied that political life can be understood best or guided by what is highest. Yet Strauss, notwith-

standing his respect, or even awe, of Machiavelli's greatness, quietly denied that denial. No brief quotation can epitomize the vast sweep of Strauss's work, but I commend to you the following, for the concise simplicity—indeed for the classic grandeur—with which it denies Machiavelli's most fundamental denial. It is taken from the Preface to the 1965 translation of *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*. "It is safer," wrote Strauss, "to try to understand the low in the light of the high than the high in the light of the low. In doing the latter one necessarily distorts the high, whereas in doing the former one does not deprive the low of the freedom to reveal itself fully as what it is." Clearly, all the state of nature theorists, and all the historical schools, tried to understand decent civil society—the high—in the light of the most indecent and powerful passions. Kant's doctrine of Categorical Imperative would seem to be that point in modern philosophical thought furthest removed from Machiavellianism. In it, every consideration of personal advantage, every element of expedience, would seem to be removed. But what is the "good will" celebrated by Kant? Is it not an abstraction from that view of morality that is drawn from the distinction between mere interestedness and disinterestedness? And is not this view blind to the differences between noble and base interests? Is not Kant's attempt to "democratize" morality, by getting rid of the wise man as the judge of the moral man, an attempt to present the high in the light of the low? There are other and even stronger proofs that in the decisive respects, Kant too was a Machiavellian.

# Crisis of the Strauss Divided

*Essays on Leo Strauss and Straussianism,  
East and West*

Harry V. Jaffa

With Thomas L. Pangle, John A.  
Wettergreen, Robert P. Kraynak,  
Michael P. Zuckert, and Leo Strauss

WILLMOORE KENDALL—LEO STRAUSS  
CORRESPONDENCE

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June 11, 1949  
Professor Leo Strauss  
University of Chicago  
Chicago, IL

Dear Professor Strauss:

Do you by any chance have left any off-prints of the two articles, that on the classical politics or that on hidden writing?

Social Research can't supply me the issues that contained them, and I'd like awfully to have them on my shelves—or, if not both, then either of them.

If you can oblige me about this, please ignore the address above, and address me at 150-95 Village Road, Jamaica, L.I. (apt. D).

Your piece on Rousseau<sup>1</sup> gave me quite a jolt, for which I am deeply grateful.

Sincerely,

Willmoore Kendall

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Thursday, 1955

Dear Professor Strauss:

I gave one of the six lectures Bill Volker arranged for Buck Hill<sup>2</sup> in lieu of yours' a long-postponed study of the *Areopagetica*, which kept me busy in my hotel room almost every moment the Conference wasn't in session. Else, believe me, I should never have let two weeks go by without writing to say how sorry

I am to learn of your illness, and how disappointing it was not to have you at the Conference, and hear your lectures, and best of all, come to know you a little. I think I have never before had an opportunity to say how deeply indebted I am to your books.

I hope and pray for news of your early recovery.

Sincerely yours,  
Willmoore Kendall

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November 19, 1956  
Professor Wilmoore Kendall  
Department of Political Science  
Yale University  
New Haven, CT

Dear Professor Kendall:

For some time I have been receiving *The National Review*. You will not be surprised to hear that I agree with many articles appearing in the journal, especially your own. There is, however, one feature of the journal which I completely fail to comprehend. It is incomprehensible to me that the authors who touch on that subject are so unqualifiedly opposed to the state of Israel. No reasons why that stand is taken are given; mere antipathies are voiced. For I can not call reasons such arguments as are based on gross factual error, or on complete non-comprehension of the things which matter. I am, therefore, tempted to believe that the authors in question are driven by an anti-Jewish animus; but I have learned to resist temptations. I have been teaching at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem for the whole academic year of 1954-1955, and what I am going to say is based exclusively on what I have seen with my own eyes.

The first thing which strikes one in Israel is that the country is a western country, which educates its many immigrants from the East in the ways of the West: Israel is the only country which as a country is an outpost of the West in the East. Furthermore, Israel is a country which is surrounded by mortal enemies of overwhelming numerical superiority, and in which a single book absolutely predominates in the instruction given in elementary schools and in high schools: the Hebrew bible. Whatever the failings of individuals may be, the spirit of the country as a whole can justly be described in these terms: heroic austerity supported by the nearness of biblical antiquity. A conservative, I take it, is a man who

believes that "everything good is heritage." I know of no country today in which this belief is stronger and less lethargic than in Israel.

But the country is poor, lacks oil and many other things which fetch much money; the venture on which the country rests may well appear to be quixotic; the University and the Government buildings are within easy range of Jordanian guns; the possibility of disastrous defeat or failure is obvious and always close. A conservative, I take it, is a man who despises vulgarity; but the argument which is concerned exclusively with calculations of success, and is based on blindness to the nobility of the effort, is vulgar.

I hear the argument that the country is run by labor unions. I believe that it is a gross exaggeration to say that the country is run by the labor unions. But even if it were true, I would say that a conservative, I take it, is a man who knows that the same arrangement may have very different meanings in different circumstances. The men who are governing Israel at present came from Russia at the beginning of the century. They are much more properly described as pioneers than as labor unionists. They were the men who laid the foundations under hopelessly difficult conditions. They are justly looked up to by all non-doctrinaires as the natural aristocracy of the country, for the same reasons for which Americans look up to the Pilgrim fathers. They came from Russia, the country of Nicolai the Second and Rasputin; hence they could not have had any experience of constitutional life and of that true liberalism which is only the reverse side of conservatism; it is all the more admirable that they founded a constitutional democracy adorned by an exemplary judiciary.

On Page 16 of your November 17 issue of the *Review*, Israel is called a racist state. The author does not say what he understands by a "racist state," nor does he offer any proof for the assertion that Israel is a racist state. Would he by any chance have in mind the fact that in the state of Israel there is no civil marriage, but only Jewish, Christian and Muslim marriages, and therefore that mixed marriages in the non-racist sense of the term are impossible in Israel? I am not so certain that civil marriage is under all circumstances an unmitigated blessing, as to disapprove of this particular feature of the state of Israel.

Finally, I wish to say that the founder of Zionism, Herzl,<sup>3</sup> was fundamentally a conservative man, guided in his Zionism by conservative considerations. (Some years ago, *Commentary* published an attack from a "Liberal" point of view on Herzl. If my recollection does not deceive me, that article is sufficient to prove the point which I am making.) The moral spine of the Jews was in danger of being broken by the so-called emancipation of the Jews which in many cases had alienated them from their heritage, and yet not given them anything more than merely formal equality; it had brought about a condition which has been called "exter-

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nal freedom and inner servitude;" political Zionism was the attempt to restore that inner freedom, that simple dignity, of which only people who remember their heritage and are loyal to their fate, are capable. Political Zionism is problematic for obvious reasons. But I can never forget what it achieved as a moral force in an era of complete dissolution. It helped to stem the tide of "progressive" leveling of venerable, ancestral differences; it fulfilled a conservative function.

I felt it was my duty to bring these considerations to your attention. I would appreciate it if you were good enough to reply to this letter.

Sincerely yours,

Leo Strauss

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2 Dec. 1956

Dear Professor Strauss,

Thank you many times for your recent letter about *National Review* and its Israel policy, all of which was very welcome except the suggestion that I might conceivably leave a communication from you unanswered.

May I speak frankly but in strict confidence in reply to the questions you raise?

1) You should have been somewhat better pleased with our editorial stand since the Israeli invasion of Sinai and Gaza. But I agree only somewhat: our support for Israel, though all-out, has been reluctant in tone.

2) I agree completely—I personally, that is—with the position set forth in your letter, and out of a lesser knowledge and skill have urged it for many months at editorial meetings. And I am as mystified as you concerning the ultimate sources of the anti-Israel bias among my colleagues, and in Right-wing circles in general. At *National Review* anyhow, I am convinced that it is not anti-semitism (unless on the part of the one Jewish member of the Board). Bill Buckley, let me be clear, sets editorial policy, comes of anti-Semitic parents, but to me for many years the astonishing thing about the Buckley family (fascinating to any political theorist) is the elder Buckley's failure, in a context of having communicated his religion, his way of life, his political ideas, with incredible success to each and every one of nine children, to carry them along on anti-Semitism; and I have seen Bill in too many situations where he was courageously anti-anti-Semitic, to suppose him likely to carry anti-Semitic attitudes into the making of magazine policy.



3) I do have a hypothesis about all this, involving differences between me and my colleagues that appear marginally in my column and will not have been lost on so close a reader as you. We all grew up in the intellectual climate of what the magazine calls Liberalism; all of us have "broken" with the general corpus of Liberal dogma; but different ones of us are still to very different degree still prisoners to this Liberal tenet as that one; and Bill has been, for my money, particularly laggard about two of them, namely, that concerning Equality (so that on the crucial level of discourse he really does conceive of one Arab as "equal" to one Jew), and that concerning freedom of thought and speech (so that any State that moves in any way to assure homogeneity of opinion and attitude among its citizens automatically incurs his displeasure). Let me not beg either question; but I do believe that any Conservative position not based upon a view of Equality first cousin at least to that in Aristotle's *Ethics*, and a view of freedom of thought and speech not first cousin at least to Spinoza's, will end up delivering itself into its enemies' hands. The Israel issue is, on this showing, derivative from certain logically prior positions, which have dictated the magazine's policies on, e.g., the Desegregation issue (Equality) and the Dominican Republic (Freedom of thought and speech, which ends you up thinking poorly of any State so persuaded of the goodness of its goods as to be willing to pay the military-and-mobilization price for its survival, which may in a difficult strategic background be very high). This last, incidentally, is an old problem; my wife,<sup>4</sup> whom I have since lost, was "on" the Israel desk at CIA for several years, and I watched her move from a pro-Israel position—over my continuous protest—to an anti-Israel position because of "militarization" and "reliance on force in foreign policy."

4) The question quite properly arises, which I would regard you as one of very few people to whom I would give an answer, Why if I disagree do I leave my name on the mast-head? Well, for one thing, the magazine seems to me quite right and courageous on many issues, and I have learned at great cost through the years not to expect too much acquiescence in my own views from the organization in which I participate. For another, my chances of influencing it on the points on which it seems to me wrong are much greater inside than outside. And, finally, Bill Buckley and Brent Bozell<sup>5</sup> are, above all in my eyes, pupils of mine, whom I feel a teacherly obligation, at this time, to "let have their heads," and whom I wish never to feel that I am asserting any so-to-speak master's authority over. Again the Equality Business; for you also as a teacher must know that one often, in handling that phase where the pupil demands his head, acts "less than equal" (i.e., fails to claim one's equal "rights") precisely because one is "more than equal," and sees the dangers, for the pupil, of pressing such issues.

Please do not hesitate to write to me further if this explanation is not satisfactory to you.

I know from your pupils how reluctant you are to let go of a manuscript until it is just as you want it; but may I say I'd give my right arm to read your Buck Hill Falls lectures—with, of course, a firm promise not to treat them as "published" by dint of being lent to me. Could you conceivably be persuaded?

Yours sincerely,  
Willmoore Kendall

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December 5, 1956

Dear Professor Strauss:

Just as an addendum to my recent letter, how would you feel about our publishing your letter on Israel—whether over your signature or withholding your name? I should greatly appreciate a word from you about this.

Sincerely yours,  
Willmoore Kendall

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December 6, 1956  
Professor Willmoore Kendall  
Department of Political Science  
Yale University  
New Haven, Connecticut

Dear Professor Kendall:

I was very happy indeed to receive your informative communication, and I wish to say at once that it has satisfied me completely. I am glad that you have disposed of any possibility of misunderstanding between you and me. It goes without saying that I will observe the strict confidence which you request. Perhaps you will have the opportunity to use one or another point I made in my letter, in your discussions with your colleagues.

I did notice the change in your editorial after the Israel invasion of Sinai and Gaza, and I was glad that reality did receive some recognition after all. I was espe-

cially gratified by your analysis of the possible motives of the anti-Israel stand of the gentlemen in question, and by the statement of principles which you make in that context (Aristotle on equality and Spinoza on Freedom of Speech.) With the latter statement I entirely concur.

As for my Buck Hills Falls lectures, they had not been written up when I was stricken last spring, and after my convalescence I was completely unable, on account of more pressing commitments, to do any work on them. But there exists an earlier and much shorter version (roughly three lectures) of which I shall be glad to send you a mimeographed copy as soon as it will be ready, i.e., in about a week's time.

With kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,

Leo Strauss

LS:mfg

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December 7, 1956

Professor Willmoore Kendall

The National Review

211 E. 37th Street

New York 16, New York

Dear Professor Kendall:

I have no objection to your publishing my letter on Israel.<sup>6</sup> But if you do so, it is necessary that it be published over my signature. There are some minor changes which would have to be made in case of publication. I think that the sentences indicating that the letter was a private letter (that is to say, the first two and the last two sentences) should be omitted, and also, therefore, the "however" in line 3. I have been told that the "I have been teaching" in the fourth line before the last of the first paragraph, is not good English, and that I ought to say "I taught."

In the fourth paragraph, line 4, I suggest that "I should say that" be omitted. In the sixth paragraph, the remark in parentheses should be omitted because I do not like making a public statement on the basis of recollection, and I simply do not have the time to look up the article again. Finally, I was told that in the sentence beginning in line 6 of the 6th paragraph, the second "of the Jews" is stylistically awkward.

I apologize for my pendantism, but at my age I can't change any more.

Sincerely yours,

Leo Strauss

LS:mfg

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Ciudad Trujillo, R. D.

9 January 1957

Dear Professor Strauss,

This is a tardy moment at which to be writing you my thanks for the two letters I have received from you since I last wrote. I am more glad than I know how to say that you felt we understood each other about the Israel issue, and the bearing upon it of modern heresies that have nothing really to do with Israel but strike at the very heart of traditional political philosophy. And I am deeply grateful for your permission to publish your original letter in the *Review*, and only hope that the printed version—from which I took the last-minute liberty of deleting the reference to my contributions—embodied satisfactorily the editorial changes you had wished. I was not able, as I should have liked to do, to see the proof before my departure from New York.

I shall be much less active in the *Review* upon my return—partly because of some things you must have read between the lines of my letter about the position on Israel, but mostly because of a too-long-postponed decision as to how to spend the late afternoon and evening of my life (I have been in the classroom only five years since 1941, the rest of my time having gone on the nation's current and future wars). Within the limits set by my economic possibilities I propose, from here on out, to avoid all forms of "activism" as much as possible, and do what I can—here the limits are not, alas, economic—with the range of problems that you have done so much to illuminate over the years. I hope, for one thing, to write at last my introduction to the *Social Contract*, which I have been turning over in my mind for many years—though not, I like to think, without having had an opportunity to talk over with you, through some long evening, some rather sharp differences between my reading of Rousseau and your own, and a certain methodological issue as well which you will hardly fail to sense in the fact of my isolating this single work for separate treatment. Concretely, I feel that the meaning of the *Social Contract* (which seems to me to reflect some very firm decisions on J.-J.'s part as to what in his other writing's must be excluded) tends to be obscured by any

attempt to deal with it in conjunction with his other works (so as to arrive at a political theory of Rousseau).<sup>7</sup> (I wonder if you have ever looked at my translation, whose discrepancies from the others—and, as I learned rather tardily, from what even a contemporary Frenchman sees when he looks at the text—give away most of what I shall be saying in my introduction?)

Did I hear somewhere that you are not to be at Chicago next year? I hope and pray, if so, that it does not mean that like Voegelin you are returning to Europe.

Yours sincerely,  
Willmoore Kendall

P.S. My trip here has been a great disappointment: I had had reason to believe I was to see, and be able to write about, the inner workings of this regime, which I regard as in many respects—most particularly because of the archaic concepts in terms of which alone it might be understood—the most fascinating of our time: it is Hobbes' "public-spirited" political philosophy, in your own phrase, translated into palpitating reality; wherefore to call it, as men commonly do, a dictatorship based on something called force, is to miss all in it that is most interesting. But the official decision has finally gone against my enterprise.

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January 21, 1957  
Mr. Willmoore Kendall  
Department of Political Science  
Yale University  
New Haven, Connecticut

Dear Mr. Kendall:

Thank you very much for your letter of January 9, which I received last week. I was satisfied with the printed version of my letter to you on the State of Israel. There was one printing error, but these things do happen from time to time.

What you wrote to me about your own plans was very interesting to me. I shall look forward to seeing your interpretation of Rousseau fully developed. I have not seen your translation of *The Social Contract*; I have merely heard of your planning to make a translation of the letter to D'Alembert. Perhaps you will give me the reference to your translation of *The Social Contract* so that I can use it when I take up Rousseau again in my seminar. Surely there is a profound disagreement between you and me regarding Rousseau, and I shall be very hard to