

you like, for us to be able to act politically with some confidence that we are not defeating our ethical ends.

As Aristotle saw, however, political science can provide us with that kind of knowledge only if it is itself ethically neutral (as, shall we say, toxicology is ethically neutral as between the poisons and the antidotes, the poisoners and the physicians). And de Jouvenel, who is certainly no relativist, commits, in this book, a twofold misdemeanor: he presupposes a "good" for his science, and in doing so, takes as his "good" one (any old human cooperation) which is—as he would see at once if he tested it against his own ethics—a patently false one. Or rather he commits a triple misdemeanor, because in due course he picks up a second good—that darling of the Liberals known as "progress"—that is also patently false. For from an ethical standpoint, progress is good only if it be in an ethically desirable direction—which is to say that some "progress" is good and some bad. To settle all the major issues of politics by appealing now to the good of cooperation as such, now to the good of progress as such, as de Jouvenel does, is both bad methodology and bad ethics. And that—from de Jouvenel above all the political scientists visible on the horizon—for this reviewer will not do.

To put the same point in another way: *Sovereignty* is a book to be instructed by, not one to be influenced by, because—dare the pupil say it frankly to the master, both in politics and in ethics?—its teachings on the level of political ethics are, quite simply, wrong. De Jouvenel does here to political ethics that which he accuses modern man of having done to politics. That is, he cuts them off from their proper orientation to true religion, and launches them upon the treacherous sea of relativism.

He sees—and describes more eloquently than any of his contemporaries—the evil of the modern politics; off at the end, however, he has nothing to say except "Settle for it." He sees, more clearly than any of his contemporaries, that the "open society," the society without an orthodoxy, leads unavoidably first to greater diversity of opinion than any society can carry, and then to persecution. Yet his teaching here is, "Let us keep our societies open, lest we fail to progress." He is aware, far beyond any

of his contemporaries, that man cannot subsist without the warmth and certainty that attach to the face-to-face community based upon common religious and ethical beliefs; yet he denounces as totalitarian all who would encourage modern man to abandon Babylon (his name for open society) in favor of Icaria (his name for the community founded on shared belief).

His example, however, is better by far than his precept. He himself lives in a charming Icaria called Anserville.

WHAT IS POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY? By LEO STRAUSS

(Glencoe: Free Press, 1959.)

All histories of political philosophy are abominable, and for two excellent reasons. Nobody knows enough to write a history of political philosophy. And if, *per impossibile*, someone did know enough to write a history of political philosophy, the last thing he would take time for would be to write a history of political philosophy.

Why does no one know enough to write a history of political philosophy? Again for two excellent reasons. In the first place, the mastering of any single one of the books that the tradition has identified as the great ventures in political theory requires not that hasty reading over the week-end that will enable another chapter in a "history," but months and years and even decades of living with, of rethinking, of what I like to call "universal confrontation of the text." No lifetime is long enough to permit a man to do that with many texts. Indeed, the more texts a man tries to do it with, the *less* optimistic he becomes about the possibility of doing it with many more, because he understands better and better the vastness of the undertaking.

Secondly, the more a man learns about political philosophy the less interested he becomes in its history as such—as contrasted

with the constantly recurring problems (the same problems, some of us believe, in every age) with which it deals.

This is not to say, of course, that no historical problems arise in connection with political philosophy, or that these problems (provided one knows why one raises them) are without interest. The Greeks, as Mrs. Disraeli was never able to remember, came before the Romans, Socrates before Plato, and Plato before Aristotle, and Aristotle before Cicero. Those who came after were able, had they the humility and wit to do so (which they did not always have), to pick up the problems where their predecessors left off. So, as we understand how the great men of political philosophy are related to one another with respect to the great problems, we do come out with a kind of history. But this "history" is worthy of attention not because it is history, not because it tells us what happened, but because of the light it throws on such urgent questions as: What *are* the real problems? What is the extent of our continuing ignorance of the solutions?

The Greeks came, we repeat, before the Romans; but above all the classical political philosophers and the medieval political philosophers came before Machiavelli, and Machiavelli before Hobbes, Hobbes before Locke, Locke before Burke and Rousseau and the Federalists, Burke and Rousseau and the Federalists before Kant and Hegel, Kant and Hegel before Marx, before Hitler, and before our present-day positivists and historicists—before, that is, the present-day denial of the very possibility of political philosophy. Now, whatever else there is to be said about our histories of political philosophy, and even conceding, reluctantly, that they make a certain amount of sense about the "story" from Plato to, say, Dante, nothing can be more certain than that they go to pieces when they come to Machiavelli. Of Machiavelli, as of each of his great successors, we have a long series of wildly conflicting interpretations, over against which you just pay your money and takes your choice.

Professor Leo Strauss, whose newly-published *What is Political Philosophy?* is the occasion for the present statement, has created over the past thirty years a vast and fascinating literature whose

central purpose we can now see to have been from the beginning that of making sense of the great political thinkers of the modern period. Although *not* a "history" of them, I suppose one could now piece together out of his works a sort of history. I doubt that he would thank anyone for doing so, and this was certainly not his aim. What he has done is to take up the writers in question, one at a time, and to stay with each until—to use one of his own favorite phrases—he understands him *as he understood himself*.

As for those wildly-conflicting interpretations, his contention has always been that, if we fail to make sense out of the writings of a Hobbes or a Spinoza or a Rousseau, that is probably because we have not given ourselves the pains to learn to read them. The difficulty we have in reading them is itself a problem for political philosophy—perhaps, until we learn how to read them, *the* problem. We have been attempting to read them from the wrong vantage-point in time, and with the wrong question on our lips—namely, "What did they 'contribute' to political philosophy?"—where the right question is, "Who killed political philosophy, and how?" And that question we, corrupted as we are by the very thinkers we seek to understand, can hope to answer only by approaching it from a vantage-point philosophically prior to the murder; that is, from within the classical and Biblical tradition our suspects (as we may now fairly call them) have (as from within the tradition we clearly see) not *sought* to undermine and destroy, but *have* undermined and destroyed.

The Strauss investigation over the years emerges, with the publication of his two latest books, as that of a detective who starts out with a dead body, that of political philosophy (if you want to see it yourself, go take a look at pretty much any political science department), whose former owner may or may not have died a natural death. At the beginning we do not know whether a crime has been committed, or, if one has, what is the nature of that crime. The one thing we can be sure of is that if a crime was committed, the criminal or criminals will have attempted to cover their tracks. But also, wishing in the end to have the credit

for having committed the crime successfully—thus wishing us in a sense to find them out—they will have left us the clues we need.

Like all good detective investigations, it is revealed to us with a considerable element of “suspense.” The “master-mind” of the crime came to light only with the publication, last year, of *Thoughts on Machiavelli*. Only then did we learn that we were not dealing with a criminal but with a criminal syndicate; worse still, with a criminal syndicate that develops in each generation a new master-mind who carries the crime a little further and gives it a new “twist”; and, again worse still, that the greatest crime of the syndicate is not so much the murder (though a collective and continuous murder there has indeed been) but the creation of a state of affairs where committing the murder is no longer a crime at all, but a ticket to respectability and honor. Killing political philosophy is no longer “wrong”; it can’t be, because everybody, including the nicest people one encounters at faculty-meetings, does it. That, if I understand Professor Strauss, is exactly how Machiavelli not only intended the story to come out, but took measures to make sure it did.

*What is Political Philosophy?* includes, among other things, the clearest statement we have from Professor Strauss of the method he has developed for reading the modern political philosophers. It contains, too, brilliant restatements of traditional teaching on the great problems of political philosophy and a running attack on relativism, positivism and historicism. Both of these should be not required reading but scripture for everyone who likes to think of himself as a Conservative. Taken together with the *Machiavelli*, moreover, it extends to any who wish to have it what has hitherto been a privilege reserved to a handful of students at the New School and the University of Chicago—that of learning political philosophy at the feet of the great teacher of political philosophy, not of our time alone, but of any time since Machiavelli. What is more, they will come away from reading him better, more virtuous men. For Professor Strauss, though (to use a phrase he is fond of) he would never seek to be edifying, is edifying in and of himself.

WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS:  
CATHOLIC REFLECTIONS ON THE  
AMERICAN PROPOSITION.

By JOHN COURTNEY MURRAY

(New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960.)

With the publication of his *We Hold These Truths* John Courtney Murray ceases to be mere teacher (at a college which performs a crucial function in the formation of American Jesuits), editor (of a distinguished theological journal), lecturer (before eager audiences all over the country), writer of articles (there is, to be sure, quite a bibliography of them: he is internationally prominent in one of the great continuing debates within the Catholic Church, and has contributed to many American journals of opinion), and becomes an *author*. But a reader readily sees why the event has been so long postponed: Father Murray’s mind has been pregnant all this while with quintuplets, each with an equal right and an equal determination to be born, so that *We Hold These Truths* is *inter alia* a great act of distributive justice—for he has determined and contrived that all five of them should be birthed at one and the same time.

First, there is a book about the problems, perplexities, and “uneasinesses” of what Murray calls the “post modern” world, and the direction in which it must move—philosophically, morally, politically—in order to come to grips with its problems, dispel its perplexities, and free itself from its uneasiness. Here, he believes, our great danger is that of concentrating too much attention upon international Communism, which is merely “modern” politics carried to its logical conclusion (Communism, he argues, makes explicit and deliberate that which in modernity, in its non-Communist form, is merely implicit and “unintentional”). On the contrary, our truly urgent business is the Basic Issues, which are