

INTRODUCTION

CHRISTOPHER LYNCH AND JONATHAN MARKS

In “An Epilogue” to *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*, Leo Strauss invokes the man from Missouri, that “incarnation of the empirical spirit,” who “has to be shown.” But to be shown, the man from Missouri does not insist upon methodological rigor or on arguments that take absolutely nothing for granted. Indeed, he himself “takes it for granted that he lives with other human beings of all descriptions in the same world and that because they are all human beings they understand each other somehow; he knows that if this were not so, political life would be altogether impossible.”¹ Even and especially in the midst of his skeptical demand, the man from Missouri affirms the reality of the realm of politics. He assumes, in other words, that he operates within a world consisting of human beings debating and discussing what they should do about matters of importance to them.

The perspective of the man from Missouri is entirely abandoned by the type of political science criticized by Strauss. This new political science looks at “political things from without, in the perspective of a neutral observer, in the same perspective from which one would look at triangles or fish.”² The perspective of the political scientist, on this understanding, need be no truer to the perspective of the citizen—even provisionally—than the perspective of the ichthyologist is to the perspective of a fish. In particular, to the new political science what citizens and statesmen say—their conscious, publicly articulated reasons for their actions—is essentially uninteresting as compared to the psychological or organizational theories that explain what really moves politics and which

political speech frequently obscures. An ichthyologist may listen to the sounds a fish makes for clues to its behavior, but she is not going to get far asking it why it does what it does.

Strauss compares unfavorably this new political science to the old Aristotelian political science it rejects. That older political science views “things in the perspective of the citizen.” It assumes that what is important to the citizen as citizen is relevant, even essential, to the political scientist’s search for the truth about politics. In particular, the old political science orients itself by the qualitative differences among regimes, between “the qualitatively different purposes constituting and legitimating them” that are the basis of a reasoned determination of what is and what is not a matter of political importance. Like the man from Missouri, adherents of the old political science are not inclined to understand the differences between Athens and Sparta, or liberalism and Islamism, as differences among ideologies, that is, more or less sophisticated prejudices. They are inclined instead to investigate the “principles of preference” that govern the political man’s concern with “what is to be done politically here and now,”³ that is, his reasons for his decisions.

That does not mean the old political science permanently adopts the view of the man from Missouri. For one thing, the man from Missouri probably has a partisan perspective, whereas “the political scientist or political philosopher must become the umpire” whose “perspective encompasses the partisan perspectives because he possesses a clearer grasp of man’s natural ends and their natural order than do the partisans.”⁴ The political philosopher, as umpire, does not eschew the partisan perspectives; he understands them on their own terms while determining their places with respect to the natural ends to which they point, however imperfectly; Strauss writes of such ends as constitutive of “heterogeneity,” of the separation of human things into whole spheres of activities or ways of life, the most decisively important of which is the political regime. Because the old political science adopts the perspective of the citizen and statesman only provisionally, it transcends that perspective. It nonetheless does not simply cancel or negate it; the old political science most certainly does not bypass the perspective of the citizen and statesman.

In quoting Strauss on the subject of the new political science, we do not mean to suggest that nothing has changed since 1962. But it is no less the case now than it was then that political science is considered a branch of the social sciences and that social sciences aspire to be more like the natural sciences than they are. The authors of political science articles today are no more likely than they were then to look

for insight to classical political philosophy, the questions of which are “raised in assemblies, councils, clubs, and cabinets” and the terminology of which is “intelligible and familiar, at least to all sane adults, from everyday experience and everyday usage.”⁵ Even the “constructivist” turn in social and political science, which emphasizes that beliefs influence how people and states act, is founded on the decidedly abstract opposition between “rationalism” and the social construction of reality.⁶ The insight into the limitations of conventional social science that gives rise to constructivism represents a turn, not from a narrow political perspective toward a more comprehensive one, but from a political science that apes the natural sciences to “cultural studies”—and therewith constructivism abandons both science and politics.

This book explores the possibility that the best—and perhaps only—path toward a non-arbitrary approach to the study of politics leads through the realm of politics as it presents itself in practice, independent of scientific theories as such but redolent with recourse to moral principles held in common by and within individual regimes, recourse, that is, to shared and competing understandings of the common good. We do not thereby deny the importance of the factors the new political science emphasizes, such as class, institutional structures, or maximization strategies; nor do we deny the importance of backroom deals and other secret machinations featured in more popular presentations of politics. But we consider the possibility that these factors are better seen as necessary conditions of political life than as the sum total of political life as it really is. We also doubt the ability of modern social and political science fully to grasp even these lower factors and to weigh their relative importance more adequately than the actors themselves—especially the most capable of those actors. For no one can survive in the political arena for long without taking into account the internal motives and external constraints on other actual and potential political actors. The greater the prudence of the actor, the better will such factors be reflected in that actor’s judgments and arguments about what is good for his community.

But at the same time that such actors must attend to such necessary conditions of politics, they are also aware of the purposes, to which we have already referred, of the distinctive communities they find themselves in and which they in turn shape. Perhaps the defining quality of the most capable actors at the height of politics is the ability to take account of the preconditions of their communities’ existence without forgetting the ultimate purpose of those communities. When we distinguish a leader or ruler with the term “statesman” we are pointing to this ability, which we

call prudence. But we evaluate even the ordinary leaders who compete for distinction in terms of arguments they make or that can be made concerning our good and how it can be pursued under present conditions. The realm of politics we inquire into is thus characterized by disputes about both principles and the prudent application of principles.

What can be said at the outset regarding the relationship between these two components of political life? The relationship between principle and prudence is perhaps best characterized in chapter 12, in which Nathan Tarcov argues that it “is not dichotomous but complementary, a relation of application and judgment. Principles are not self-applying; they do not tell you what to do. They require prudence and judgment for their application. Prudence is not self-sufficient either; it requires principles for guidance.” In this instance, Tarcov is dealing with international relations in particular. He labels as “abstractions” such theories as “realism” and its alternatives, and he considers as “pathologies” those examples of actual statesmanship that decouple principle and prudence in either a “realist direction,” as in the statesmanship of a Henry Kissinger or in an “idealist,” liberal internationalist direction as in that of a Jimmy Carter.

The reference to Kissinger reminds one that although we have for the most part emphasized the defects of “realism” in regard to its neglect of principle, one could also emphasize the narrow understanding of prudence it often suggests. The prudent politician is either a more or less open Machiavellian or something of a technocrat who disdains the “vision thing.” Thus one has either vision—seemingly consisting in principle without consideration for prudence—or prudence—consisting in a kind of managerial expertise without consideration for principle—but not both. Restoring a sense of the proper relationship between principle and prudence may contribute to a deepening of our political discourse, which tends to treat major political figures alternately as sincerely and therefore dangerously ideological, or as cynical and concerned only with how to increase their power. Much of the debate among critics of recent major political figures such as Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama has centered on whether they are dangerous because they believe in and implement their principles or whether they are so pragmatic as to lack fundamental guiding principles. Our political imagination struggles to suggest to us the ways in which principle and prudence can and should complement one another.

The claim that prudence and principle require one another may seem to imply that the relationship is a necessary one. The necessity

of the connection between principles and practice can be understood strictly: political actors cannot practice politics without some recourse to principles that guide their actions, and principles cannot be applied in the absence of prudence. Yet the strict character of this claim seems to go too far for present purposes. It is less that there can be no politics whatsoever in the absence of either principle or prudence than that there can be no healthy politics without both. Indeed, the quality or health of a particular regime may be said to result in no small measure from whether and how principle and prudence are both present and complementary. As Karl Walling says in chapter 3, it “would appear that the human heart and mind are so constructed that most find it difficult (though obviously not impossible) to support and defend either the expedient, if it appears to be unjust in our eyes or those of the audiences we seek to persuade, or the just, if it appears to conflict with what we consider necessary for our safety and well-being. Human nature requires some effort to unite principle with prudence.”

We have asserted the independence of the realm of politics and proposed that those who stray too far from the orientation of the man from Missouri run the risk of serious misunderstanding. But the very questions that politics presents concerning justice and the good tend to lead us out of the political realm—recall Strauss’s reference to “man’s natural ends and their natural order.” For one thing, the question of the best political order cannot be limited to the question of the best political order for us at a particular time and place. The “man who rejects kingship for Israel cannot help using arguments against kingship as such.”⁷ For another, the question concerning which virtue gives one title to rule may lead the political philosopher to the conclusion that “the ultimate aim of political life cannot be reached by political life, but only by a life devoted to contemplation.” The political philosopher is “compelled to transcend not merely the dimension of common opinion, or political opinion, but the dimension of political life as such.”⁸ The political philosopher may appear in this light as a hyper-enlightened statesman or legislator—an educator of statesmen and legislators who is able prudently to moderate ambitions, hopes, and fears of citizens and statesmen in no small part because his concerns are ultimately different from theirs.

For this very reason, that the philosopher’s concerns are different from the concerns of citizens and statesmen, the relationship between the principle or purpose that governs the political philosopher and the principles that govern political life itself is fraught. This relationship is made thematic in premodern political philosophy in disputes about

whether the political life or the philosophical life is the best, and in investigations of the charge that the philosopher is a useless or pernicious citizen. For the early moderns this theme recedes as philosophers themselves step forth to provide not only education and moderation but principles for action and general enlightenment; it then reemerges in the form of Rousseauan critique of reason's role in politics, suggesting, as Heinrich Meier shows in chapter 9, that "the introduction of insight as title to rule would shatter the social order."

In keeping with these differences, we have divided modern political thought from classical ("Athens") and Biblical ("Jerusalem") political thought, supposing that there is at least something to Machiavelli's bold claim to depart from his predecessors, of which Peter Ahrens Dorf and Richard Ruderman both remind us in our first two essays:

And many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth; for it is so far from how one lives to how one should live that he who lets go of what is done for what should be done learns his ruin rather than his preservation.⁹

While noting ways in which ancient authors anticipated this Machiavellian challenge in important respects, Ahrens Dorf and Ruderman, as well as other authors in the section of this volume on the ancients, emphasize the ineluctability of appeals to principle, or to claims about the common good; they also stress the necessity for prudence understood as knowledge of principled ends and sound judgment regarding possible means to those ends. Thus, for example Ruderman notes that "Plutarch spends considerable effort spotlighting the fact that the Socratics were indeed aware of and already responding to the 'philosophic' inclination to have excessive faith in the good and the rational" and "that those statesmen influenced by Socratic philosophy . . . never let their attraction to noble virtue undermine their concern for security and success." In addition, Aristotle's complex use of Alexander the Great's political ambition could itself be regarded as eminently prudent, since that use, according to Ruderman's Plutarch, entails giving due regard to political ambition, the common good, and philosophers' relations to each. For Aristotle and the Socratics more generally sought to both pique and moderate political ambition by gently persuading potential statesmen that they could best satisfy their political ambitions through excellent service to the common good, even while hinting that full satisfaction and self-sufficiency may be found beyond the political realm in philosophy.

By contrast, early modern political philosophy, whether it has a Machiavellian emphasis on a prudence consisting mainly in flexibility, or a Hobbesian-Lockean emphasis on law and legitimacy, shares a “concern with a right or sound order of society whose actualization is probable, if not certain, or does not depend on chance.”¹⁰ That peace, stability, and acquisition are lower and more achievable aims than excellence or the best way of life is bound to influence how moderns think about or present principle and prudence. Insofar as Hobbesian political science proposes to substitute the universal, private purpose of avoiding death for qualitative distinctions among regimes concerning the common good, and permanently to stave off the threat of civil war, the need for prudence is correspondingly diminished. At its most doctrinaire modern political philosophy becomes political *theory*, thinking itself no longer “in need of being supplemented by the practical wisdom of the statesman on the spot. . . . In the decisive respect . . . there is no longer any need for statesmanship as distinguished from political theory.”¹¹ Indeed, if, as Kant proposes, the political problem can be resolved for a “nation of devils”¹² without recourse to a common good, there is no longer a need for principle *or* prudence.

In so characterizing moderns, however, we do not wish to suggest that they simply abandoned principle for security any more than we have said that the ancients were blind to the need for prudence. Indeed, we consider the safest beginning point for reflection to be the assumption that the thinkers themselves were more aware than we generally are of the need to consider the trade-offs entailed in emphasizing one more than another, or in stressing one understanding of prudence or of principle over another. They may be our best guides for sharpening our judgment of the shifting meanings of and relationship between principle and prudence, since they, we assume, were consciously modulating the expression of their thought in accordance with the needs and demands of their respective societies and, in fact, with the needs and demands of society as such. Without meaning in any way to diminish the issues that may be at stake in the substantive differences between ancient and modern understandings of these issues, we consider it likely that their differences regarding principle and prudence reflect differences in their respective “philosophic politics,”¹³ their respective efforts to negotiate in the interest of philosophy the inevitable tension between philosophy and society. This very activity of philosophers is itself necessarily a species of the relationship between prudence and principle. For every philosopher must judge as to what can and ought to be taught at his particular place and time in light of this enduring tension and for the sake of this enduring purpose or interest.

Be that as it may, a constant over time does emerge from this volume: whether writing about ancients or moderns, the authors of this volume affirm the need to consider the complementarity of principle and prudence. The “idealistic” Socrates, Richard Ruderman shows, is aware and supportive of the tougher side of statesmanship. The “realistic” Thucydides, Karl Walling shows, is aware of the limits of deception, or of the foolishness of supposing that bad policy founded on bad principles can be fixed absent a reflection on principles. Hillel Fradkin argues that even the God of the Hebrew Bible, whose wondrous power may be thought to free him from considerations of prudence, accommodates the limits of human beings. Nothing “may be too difficult for the Lord; but many things are very difficult for human beings. Human freedom, the freedom to do either good or evil, would practically guarantee some problem” that calls for the exercise of prudence, whether human or divine. As for the moderns, whatever hope they may have for a new political science, they rarely lose sight of what Richard Velkley calls the “diversity and complexity of the human,” even the “contradictory nature of the human” that resists being understood or guided by means of abstractions. At the same time, as Diana Schaub argues, Montesquieu was rightly regarded by the American founders as a teacher of principles even while ranking among the moderns as second only to Machiavelli for his emphasis on prudent flexibility. Montesquieu’s rooting of the natural law in the “right of self-preservation” may be distinctly modern, but his thought nonetheless is a reflection on the complementarity of principle and prudence that Tarcov discusses. Whatever there may be to the charge that modern political philosophy deemphasized prudence, it did not preclude what Tarcov calls that “truly golden moment between Machiavelli and Kant when political philosophy tried to restore the dignity of justice without abstracting from experience.”

Founded during that period, the United States provides especially fruitful material for reflection in a collection out to defend the independence of the realm of politics. Our third section therefore considers more or less directly the speeches and actions of statesmen compelled to answer to principled and prudential considerations. Whether Jefferson in his *Summary View* as analyzed by Ralph Lerner, the authors of the *Federalist Papers* on the use of force according to Tarcov’s presentation, or Lincoln on science and political economy as seen by Steven Smith—in each case, discerning statesmen are shown to grapple prudently with questions of prudence and principle. We do not mean to suggest that in any and every case the negotiation of these thorny questions was perfect

in execution and result. But we do mean to offer these cases as models of awareness of the questions at hand and the issues at stake.

As should be clear by now, the approach and categories used in this book owe more than a little to the writings of Leo Strauss. For it is above all Strauss who levels a critique of social and political science in the name of reflecting on politics from the point of view of the engaged citizen and statesman; who stressed the importance for political science of taking seriously the character of the regime and of the grip one's own regime is likely to have on one's opinions; and whose teachings developed the significance of the differences between the ancients and the moderns. We wish, however, not only to employ but also to examine this "Straussian" orientation. We therefore devote the concluding section to analyses of signal writings by Strauss himself. Together these essays sketch the outlines of a non-Straussian Strauss,¹⁴ one whose fuller understanding of pivotal figures in the history of political philosophy is more appreciative than his more familiar negative teachings about them.

In each of these essays, an interpretation alive to Strauss's own philosophic politics reveals Strauss's appreciation of the philosophic politics of the figure in question. Otherwise put, an awareness of Strauss's intent to preserve philosophy—as well as of the need for prudential judgments as to what can and ought to be said to this end—results in a more complete picture of these major figures. In Strauss's well-known surface teachings, Socratic political philosophy was born in opposition to pre-Socratics who were oblivious of philosophy's need for political justification; modern philosophy emerged from Machiavelli's angry rejection of Christianity and his replacement of classical philosophy with a narrow, distorted view of politics and of man; liberalism was founded by a Hobbesian Locke whose philosophy issued in the "joyless quest for joy"; and the subsequent collapse of modern philosophy found its ultimate expression in the philosophy of Nietzsche, whose immoderation facilitated the rise of the monstrous regime Strauss saw taking shape before his own eyes prior to his exile from his native Germany. Yet here Svetozar Minkov argues that Strauss's pre-Socratics at their best recognized and responded more adequately to the challenge posed by authority—both political and religious—than *Natural Right and History* appears on the surface to admit. Christopher Lynch makes the case that Strauss regarded Machiavelli as a philosopher of the very first rank whose understanding of himself and the things of the world could be criticized—if at all—only at the highest of levels of philosophic prudence; Nasser Behnegar shows Strauss's Locke ultimately to be more Thomistic and Machiavellian than

the Hobbesian Locke of *Natural Right and History*; and Robert Pippin presents a Strauss who encourages us to “concentrate on what unites Nietzsche to Plato” rather than on Nietzsche’s denunciation of Plato’s alleged dogmatism, and who sees Nietzsche as grappling theoretically with nature as a problem rather than as asserting immoderately the will to power as solution.

In each of these treatments of Strauss, Strauss’s interpretation of the writer in question hinges on issues of principled and prudent practice. For it is in the pre-Socratic awareness of the tension between divine perfection and the neediness entailed in practical activity that Minkov discerns Strauss’s greater appreciation of the pre-Socratics; it is through reflection on Machiavelli’s treatment of the fundamental problem of the dependence of morality on society that Strauss, according to Lynch, seeks to recover the permanent problems; it is in Locke’s navigation of the tension between the right of self-preservation and principles of traditional natural law teaching that Strauss, in Behnegar’s interpretation, sees that the young Locke “compromised political effectiveness for the sake of teaching the truth”; and it is in Strauss’s examination of Nietzsche’s presentation of his own nobility—superior to that of the “unprincipled, barely ‘decent’” Greeks—that Pippin shows how Strauss’s Nietzsche replaces the divine Plato. In every case, we see a philosophically prudential treatment of a version of the question of the relationship between principle and prudence. This volume’s authors do not themselves speculate on the cause of the difference between the “non-Straussian” Strauss they uncover and the “Straussian” Strauss whose limits they help to define. We suggest the possibility that Strauss’s own prudential judgments are meant to serve the cause of philosophy in its neediness and its nobility.

This book, then, will make a contribution to the study of politics by offering a wide-ranging examination of the vexed question of the relationship between principle and prudence in Western political thought. Though the importance of this question is obvious to a man from Missouri, political scientists have a hard time coming to grips with it precisely because it arises in ordinary political discourse and is not easily “theorized.” Our book is meant to be an argument for addressing it through the study of statesmen like Pericles, Jefferson, and Lincoln, and through the examination of great thinkers who have reflected on their speeches and actions. We are not deterred by the fact that this kind of inquiry cannot be expected to eventuate in definite proofs or reliable predictions. As Ruth Grant says, channeling John Locke, “reject-

ing what can be learned from research in political theory because of its messy uncertainties and disagreements, is treating a problem of blurred vision by putting out one eye. The result will be that we will see like a cyclops, with no depth of field.”¹⁵

NOTES

1. Leo Strauss, “An Epilogue,” in *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962), 211.

2. “Epilogue,” 206.

3. “Epilogue,” 214.

4. “Epilogue,” 206.

5. Leo Strauss, “On Classical Political Philosophy,” in *What is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 80.

6. Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It,” *International Organization* 46, No. 2 (Spring 1992): 393–94; 396–99. Indeed, the “post positivist” turn in the social sciences more generally moves yet another step away—via “paradigmatism,” “perspectivism,” and “relativism”—from the attempt to transform opinion about political things into knowledge of them. For “paradigmatism” (connected to Thomas Kuhn), perspectivism, and relativism, see Yosef Lapid, “The Third Debate: On the Prospects of International Theory in a Post-Positivist Era,” *International Studies Quarterly* 33, No. 2 (September 1989): 235–54. The post-positivist era is characterized by this development: “some of the most highly prized premises of Western academic discourse—including shibboleths such as “truth,” “rationality,” “objectivity,” “reality,” and “consensus”—have come under renewed critical scrutiny” (236).

7. “On Classical Political Philosophy,” 85.

8. “On Classical Political Philosophy,” 91.

9. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, tr. Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 61.

10. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 190–91.

11. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 212 (29.2); *Natural Right and History*, 192.

12. Immanuel Kant, “Perpetual Peace,” in *Political Writings*, tr. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 112.

13. This phrase, coined by Strauss in his “Restatement on Xenophon’s Hiero,” brings into play the question of whether, how, and to what degree writers’ words are designed directly or indirectly to serve the interests of philosophers as a class. The prudence of their own politics must therefore be kept in the back of one’s mind at every step.

14. We take our cue substantively in this regard from Nathan Tarcov, “On a Certain Critique of ‘Straussianism,’” in Kenneth L. Deutsch and Walter Nicgorski ed., *Leo Strauss: Political Philosopher and Jewish Thinker* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993) and formally from his call for a “‘Non-Lockean’ Locke” in his *Locke’s Education for Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) and his “A ‘Non-Lockean’ Locke and the Character of Liberalism,” in Douglas MacLean and Claudia Mills, eds., *Liberalism Reconsidered* (Totowa, NJ: Rowan and Allanheld, 1983), 130–41.

15. Ruth Grant, “Political Theory, Political Science, and Politics,” *Political Theory* 30, No. 4 (August 2002): 592.