TOPICAL ISSUES OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Colliding Times and Global Disorder: The Common Blindness to Social Time of Radical Liberalism and Leo Strauss's Neo-Conservativism

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Abstract

Taking our post-Cold War geopolitical circumstances as its contextual backdrop, this paper argues that radical liberalism and neo-conservativism, a position, that, at its most philosophical, is exemplified in the writings of Leo Strauss, fail to address the fact that human beings are caught up in different 'bodies of time.' The paper argues that the roots of the problem go back to the pioneers of liberalism, who were also major contributors to the metaphysics of modern science. It argues that social time must be a fundamental variable within any important political analysis.

Introduction

The overwhelming paradox of the contemporary world is that the world is more technologically and administratively 'ordered' than ever, but politically chaotic. Certainly it is as chaotic as it was last century, even allowing for the collapse of the balance of European powers, which drew most of the globe into a cataclysm of such immensity, so that one may argue that the chaos of today is geopolitically preferable to what existed a century ago. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the world seemed more predictable because the great global contestation was between two powers. But that was because it lay under the threat of nuclear devastation. None can be sanguine about the global future who looks at

the world's hot spots today—particularly running from Central Asia, to the Middle East and through much of Africa. There were very different sensibilities at work in 1914, 1940, 1970 and now. In 1914 there was a general European chauvinism that was the psychological accompaniment to empire. The commonplace sense of shame which is found amongst Europeans today about their imperial past was next to non-existent. Whose world would hold sway was not a question that made any sense outside of the conflicting powers of Europe. Though Japan had certainly displayed militaristic and expansive ambition in the years preceding the Great War in Korea and Russia, it was with its Manchurian conquest that Japan seriously presented itself as a ruthless member of a global political ideological power of a sort which had rendered nineteenth century concepts of empire obsolete. The ideologies of Fascism and communism, which dominated so much of the twentieth century and which led the world into the next war, now look far less like the seriously new approaches to making the future that they presented themselves to be as they emerged in the turbulence at the end of the Great War. With our distance, the fascistic and communist amalgamation of militarism, nationalism (which the ostensibly cosmopolitan ideology of communism simply could not escape), the masses, and the party, along with the economic imperatives that accompany modern industrial societies, now make these ideologies of the twentieth century look less like genuine ideological alternatives than members of a common political family which could only have emerged under a sufficiently shared set of conditions that were galvanized by the dreams and forces that are peculiar to modernity: large scale industry, modern technology, the 'crowd,' and secularised political systems expressing social interests and objectives.

While it took a world war to defeat fascism, and a cold one to defeat communism, it is becoming increasingly questionable whether liberal democracy really did win out. Just as fascism and communism had all manner of elective affinities, we are increasingly finding some of those very same affinities clustering within so called liberal democratic states—the cult of leadership in public organizations and management, the nexus of state and social knowledge, the interdependency between capital and government, the increasing contraction of civil society along with the increasing expansion of the law and policy into spheres of life once thought to be relatively outside of politics, and the emphasis upon economic calculability at the expense of all other values, once a peculiarly materialist and

Leninist contribution to governance, is now a common place. Small signs are frequently the most telling: and the phrase one hears everywhere today whether from sport coaches to business directors to politicians to departmental meetings is 'moving forward into the future.' Anyone familiar with ideological narratives of the twentieth century can hear that this phrase has far more typically fascist and Stalinist resonances than old-fashioned liberal, not to mention conservative ones.

We have, in other words, not only outlived the ideological polarisations that created the second world war and the cold war, we, at least in the industrial world, have ingested them and now continue to enact them. To be sure, the militaristic components of fascism and communism were not digestible—and those Prussian and Bismarckian remnants which were so potent in 1917 (with the Bolsheviks) and 1919 (the Italian fascists) had to be sacrificed, along with anti-Semitism, and concentration camps (though, in some places to be replaced by refugee camps, which Giorgio Agamben, borrowing from Foucault, argues expresses a fundamental underlying continuity with what is most terrifying about the modern hybrid of the Western conception of sovereignty and 'bare life').

When Fukuyama wrote his triumphalist essay and much more nuanced and ambivalent book on the end of history, he saw the future as essentially involving similar institutions for all of us.[1] But it is precisely the questionable dimension of this prediction that typifies the third period of our comparison—now. The one thinker in International Politics who has been as widely cited and criticised (in many quarters I think the accurate term is hated) as Fukuyama is Samuel Huntington. If the weakness of Fukuyama, at least as his critics saw it, was the teleological functionalism (perhaps even more Aristotelian than Hegelian) of the

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Frances Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, (London: Hamish Hamilton), 1992. Fukuyama was in many respects, and widely seen to be, a 'classic neo-con,' and then he wrote *After the Neocons: America at the Crossroads*, (London: Profile Books, 2006) in which he attacked Bush and the politics of 'regime change.' More recently his *Political Order and Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2014) takes a hard look at the difficulties democracies face, whilst conceding much greater importance to different developmental pathways and their significance than he did in *The End of History*.

premise, Huntington's was his anti-teleologism and anti-functionalism: for if the one saw freedom and recognition as the fundamental motivation behind politics, the other saw that there was no ground of mutual recognition, and that all values (hence freedom) are cultural, which he also takes to be civilizational.

The problematic nature of the term civilizational, though, is made conspicuous by Huntington's typology of civilizations: people might readily accept that there are Western, Sinic and Islamic and African civilizations, but Latin American, Orthodox, Hindu, and Buddhist civilizations? The list betrays the very problem that lurks in the more critical variable in the narrative: what makes a civilization? Spatial location/a place on the map? Shared linguistic or genetic heritage? Are Latins not Western? Religion? If as Huntington tells us, "religion is a centrally defining characteristic of civilizations,"[2] why are not all his examples of civilizations defined by it?

Huntington writes a book to make sense of such quandaries, but apart from trying to pin down the core term with a great more deal of erudition than his critics gave him credit for, one cannot help but feel that whatever value the term has is due to its macro-significance; 'civilization' must be used loosely to allow for the wars, dynastic, territorial and national rivalries, revolutions, rebellions and other (frequently violent) divisions, discontinuities and asymmetries which are internal to a 'civilization's' history. Such macro-significance is really but a 'point of entry' into countless tales of turbulence and 'momentary' coalitions. Which is to say, the term by its very nature defeats the very analytic precision that Huntington hopes to convince his readers it provides. Huntington's list of luminaries who have written on civilizations is conspicuous by the fact that their purpose was very different from his. To be sure, Huntington wants to alert his readers to the kind of complexity in international relations that was 'cloaked' by the bi-polar nature and nomenclature of the Cold War, and by the more archaic modes of social anchorage, which never really evaporated in the ideological divided twentieth century.

If I share the consensus critique of Huntington about the problem-

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[2] Samuel Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order, (London: Touchstone, 1998), 47.

atic nature of 'civilizations' as a precise term, I am broadly sympathetic to Huntington's warning of the danger of thinking everyone wants/thinks alike. Nevertheless, reference to different social memories and different rationales of different groups rather than 'civilizations' far better explains why the different European empires/nations went into the First World War, rather than the more generic term Western—though, now far more than in 1914 there is a sufficiently broad consensus shared by North America, Europe, Australasia that talk of the West, at least in certain contexts, is warranted. But I do think that in the main, since the end of the Second World War, and the Cold War, the dominant ideological alternatives within the West tend to share a normative view of society in which the significance of vastly different social memories do not count for much at all.[3] There is presently a widespread prejudice within liberal democracies that talk of serious differences plays into the hands of 'conservatives' and that talk about serious differences inevitably leads to hostilities. This 'interfaith' approach to different peoples is, I think, bound to fail, and far more likely to generate hostilities as groups of people find a narrative consensus does not fit their realities which are far more conflict-based. Concomitantly, social amnesia is the

[3] The nature of institutions in the West, even when allowing for such differences as US military spending versus European styles of welfare, are extremely similar, and, in part, it is due to shared histories. Thus, to take the welfare example, the US was far less affected by social democracy than Europe in which social democratic parties evolved in a society to give representation to workers' rights that had been much more radicalised than in the US. Nevertheless, the response to the Great Depression involved a state led programme of recovery. While the US tends to see 'socialism' as a European disease, the various conditions of compliance required in setting up a business in the US, and the various regulations upon most of them, in part driven as much by the highly litigious culture of the US as by special interest groups demanding that those entering a business must hold a license/ qualifications etc. reinforced by insurance companies defining what constitutes genuine liability claims is no less onerous than setting up a business in Europe. The different choices that states make about how they spend their revenue in the US far more on prisons and the military—does point to different political 'cultures,' with their different consensus, expectations and valorisations, but the Calvinist foundations of the US are indicative of it being a branch on a far greater tree of historical and social 'evolution.'

enemy of any possibility of genuine dialogue between peoples with different social memories—for it disables 'seeing' the Other, and it makes us unmindful of what we simply take for granted.

Liberalism and neo-conservatism both share this blindness toward historicity, at least outside of the norms they elevate as the most important ones for entering into history (i.e. looking at history on their own terms—instead of seeing the terms that contribute to their own making, or formation). Given the institutional significance, particularly in the United States, of these ostensibly antithetical discourses, it is important to investigate what liberal and neo-conservatives have in common and how, in spite of their antagonism, both are complicit in blinding people to realities that have to be better grasped if the United States—and other nations who broadly fall within its sphere of influence—are to make better geopolitical decisions.[4]

Radical Liberalism

Liberalism emerged as a way of construing government and society that required eliminating more traditional roles and claims on political office and social power. The voluntary nature of human associations is defended by the earliest theorists of 'liberal' social contract—Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Rousseau—as a right, and a right is what it is, not (again) because of any ongoing practice or obligation, but because it is held to be reasonable as such. Factually liberalism begins as a historical reaction to powers and privileges denied to those who see themselves as the politically unrepresented or insufficiently represented producers of wealth. But from the first the metaphysical seam it draws upon is that which undergirds modern 'natural philosophy,' i.e. modern classical mechanics.[5] For just as the natural philosophy that emerged in reaction to the lack of utility of traditional (Aristotelian) natural philosophy and

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[4] Amongst IR specialists Angelo Codevilla makes a similar call. See especially his *The Character of Nations: How Politics Makes and Breaks Prosperity, Family and Civility*, (New York: Basic Books 2009).

[5] In the case of Rousseau, who is followed by Kant in this respect, the notion of freedom has to be defended as rigorously untouched by the mechanistic world: thus freedom consists of 'obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves' ch. 8 Book 1, *The Social Contract*.

metaphysics dissolved the actual world of nature into the models of its imagination and the laboratory which the imagination designed, liberal philosophy dissolved real existing social relations into imagined ones and then provided reasons which would lead to a better form of governance. The great social contract theorists all did this, though none seemed to bother with the fact that the deployment of the contract itself involved recourse to a historical precedent that had been at the very heart of Europe's pre-liberal social and political arrangements. Instead they treat contracting as a 'natural' and rational act along with the other 'natural' acts they conjure: and of course none of the great social contract theorists concur about exactly what acts predominate in the state of nature. The indifference to history, which is nevertheless predicated upon the possibilities and traumas of real history, is identical to the metaphysical moves of Descartes and Spinoza. Modern science and modern politics emerge together and it is no accident that it is often the same men who are important in the philosophies of both in constructing new beginnings. Just as the metaphysics of nature of Descartes, for example, commences in the resolve to not be burdened by the useless and dead weight of history,[6] which in turn leads to a foundation and subsequent accumulation of knowledge of nature, the ahistorical foundation of the social and political will lead to (the idea of) the expansion of social and political liberty, which, paradoxically, thus leads to history itself taking

[6] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, ch.1. Descartes does say that 'the grace of fable stirs the mind; that the memorable deeds of history elevate it; and, if read with discretion, aid in forming the judgment'—but the critical issue is in the cogito, which require that everything be subject to doubt and then only that which is allowed as permissible is what conforms to the Cartesian method of the analytic break-down and synthetic reconstruction of elements. The following sentence is also salutary: 'I was thus led to take the liberty of judging of all other men by myself, and of concluding that there was no science in existence that was of such a nature as I had previously been given to believe.' http://www.gutenberg.org/files/59/59-h/59-h.htm last viewed October 5 2014. Contrary to Descartes, the value of history lies in uncovering the forgotten but still living deeds. The mechanistic metaphysicians dissolve everything into natural forces, and, for human beings, this translates as appetites, the symbolic character of social existence, itself a historical matter, is but an epiphenomena poorly *understood* by overactive imaginations.

on a moral interest which eventually becomes identified with progress over time. The morality of liberalism as a product of rational principle is outside of space and time, and it becomes the measure of what transpires within space and time. The way in which Spinoza's geometrical Ethics 'matches' a 'socio-ethical' examination, in his *A Theologico-Political Treatise*, of the bible is a model of the approach: on the one hand we have the prophets driven by the 'fleeting and inconstant' imagination,[7] on the other the calm scholar identifying the rational/natural forces at work behind the imaginings. The more our imaginings are made to conform to our nature (Spinoza)—or the maxims of practical Reason (Kant)—the more meaningful will the past be. The real truth of the enlightenment lies in the enormity of what aspects of our humanity it covers with the term 'superstition.'

History as a story of moral social and political progress enables a future to be built and uproots those aspects of past which cannot accommodate. The engine of progress is the increasingly complex nature of social association that is indicative of different socio-economic stages of history. In the movement from tribe to empire, or chieftain or warlord to state there are numerous extra kinds of social possibilities and relationships. Locke has this notion in view when he provides a rationale for the transition from simple accumulation and exchange to commerce and the need for political authority. So successful was this way of 'seeing' history that it is appropriated entirely by liberalism's bitter opponent Karl Marx, who in spite of all his claims about historical being, claims to discern the 'riddle of history' in a social formation whose key characteristic is that it is a solution to a problem of improved and increased economic production and distribution[8]—which for Marx becomes *the* problem of human association. Marx deemed it unworthy to pose any difficult theoretical questions to his solution,[9] which in spite of his insistence upon

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[7] Baruch Spinoza *A Theologico-Political Treatise* in *Spinoza: Complete Works*, translation of Samuel Shirley edited by Michael Morgan, (Indianapolis: Hackett), 404.

[8] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (1844*), in *Karl Marx Early Writings*, introduced by Lucio Colletti translated by Rodney Livingstone and Gregory Benton, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 348.

[9] Marx took pride in the fact that he did not write 'cookbooks for the future.' Afterword to the Second German edition of *Capital* volume 1. Not needing

not being an idealist remains a 'mere idea.' And after the failures of communism it is not surprising to see Marxists such as Badiou turn Marx on his head by avowing a commitment to communism as an 'idea'![10] Marx's animosity toward liberalism did not extend to the hiatus I have been suggesting between history as a plethora of contingencies played out across the times, and history understood as a matter of moral and material and social progress in which rights and liberties expand.[11]

The problem with the stage theory idea of social evolution shared by liberals who see history as meaningful and Marx is that while one may well demonstrate the increasing complexity of human association along with the opening up of human potential, techniques, technologies and so forth, this is completely consistent with a horror story about the human condition. The dystopian futures of Heidegger, Kafka, Benjamin, Adorno, Houellebecq et. al. all tap into the deep alienation which suggests that history is a nightmare from which we need to recover rather than a highway to plenty and peace.

The idea of enlightened evolution and progress has some similar features to the idea of history as providential, in so far as it breaks with the idea of history as fall or history as cyclical—history is the journey to a (promised) better future. But the providential view of history does not place all the weight of the future on the minds and moral rectitude of the

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to demonstrate how conflicting interests of distribution would be resolved—because, he argued, once private property was eliminated alienation was overcome—Marx's fall-back position was invective against anyone who doubted his method.

[10] Thus Badiou: "'Communism' as such denotes only this very general set of intellectual representations. It is what Kant called an Idea, with a regulatory function, rather than a programme," "The Communist Hypothesis," *New Left Review* 49 (Jan./Feb. 2008), 34.

[11] My argument is deeply indebted to Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy's account of social time as developed in his forgotten masterpiece, *Im Kreuz der Wirklichkeit: Eine nach-goethische Soziologie* , 3 vols., Mit einem Vorwort von Irene Scherer und einem Nachwort von Michael Gormann-Thelen, new edition of *Die Soziologie* by Michael Gormann-Thelen, Ruth Mautner, and Lise van der Molen, (Tübingen:Talheimer, 2009/10). An English translation of volume 1, *The Hegemony of Spaces*, edited by Wayne Cristaudo and Frances Huessy, and translated by Jurgen Lawrenz, with Wayne Cristaudo and Frances Huessy, is to appear with Transaction in Spring 2017.

present—providence exists in spite of our evil, in spite of our frail and limited nature. Nor does it require the conformity of all to a liberal vision of the good life. It is an amalgam of faith, hope and love: and not only our love but God's love. The providential view of history traces those enduring contributions to a more convivial society—a society worth loving, and one that is driven by the expansion of neighbourly love. Liberalism eliminates the need for God's love, if not our faith and hope, but these become as in Kant 'mere ideas.' Although Kant requires that politics be grounded in a constitutional form that is morally defensible (i.e. in conformity with the categorical imperative), his view of historical progress as a 'regulative idea' conveniently allows us to deploy a narrative of moral progress caused by socially natural necessity, whilst at the same time identifying what he believes are the naturalistic impulses harmonizing into a greater social concordance. This concordance is one in which all become part of a greater heuristic—a rational totality in which the fog of ignorance and superstition (religion) dissipates in the light of knowledge of the world and morals reason. Hegel will, of course, see that rational totality as substantive so that reason and progress are identical. Hegel supports a state with liberal features, but his attempt at reconciliation makes him hard to accommodate as a liberal, and his animosity to the appeal to any moral 'beyond' makes him as sympathetic to the rational forces behind actuality as to the negative dialectic which smashes what must perish. (Those like Marcuse, and more recently Žižek, who emphasize the dialectic of the negative and who see Hegel as revolutionary, completely ignore why he attacked all voluntarist politics of the kind he saw in Rousseau, Kant, Fichte and Fries—perhaps not surprisingly as they themselves are far more Fichtean than Hegelian.)

The liberal idea of historical progress ultimately replaces real history with a very selective history based around its ends, instead of being, as it is in its providential formulation, the yet to be known fulfilment of God's will, it is the continuation of the rational plan. The difference between the bourgeois as the end of history and the redeemed soul, Calvinist moments of grandeur aside, starkly shows the difference.

In sum, liberalism—as an ideology, a matrix of principles as opposed to a number of features which cannot be completely extricated from other social-historical components—is ahistorical at its birth and it then creates a non-historical history, a nature that is not really our nature, as it is cultivated in time. As superstition is to enlightenment, the conservative

is to the progressive liberal, just as the bourgeois will be to the communist—the terrible Other to be expunged because—paradoxically—it is not really real; it is the vestige of a former reality that lacks what the future requires. Although in all of these examples, it is the superstitious, the conservative, and the bourgeois that *haunt* the enlightened, the liberal, and the communist: and the truth is there is no total enlightenment, liberalism or communism. Each is/was (in the case of communism), at best, a partial success because each only appealed to limited aspects of what we are capable of, whether that involves knowledge, freedom, or solidarity as producers. Time is prolific and the times are fecund, but ideology diminishes by requiring that reality be squeezed into the idea that serves as the means of its articulation. This tendency to stasis is the natural corollary of not really respecting time and the role it plays in our sociality.

It is no accident that liberal political theory pays so little attention to the different phases of a life as opposed to principles such as freedom and equality which we know don't really mean a lot for all sorts of people—the infant, the frail, the elderly, the diseased etc. What we are saying in broad theoretical terms is replicated in international relations by the emphasis upon international law—a product of shared rational principles—as the means for bringing peace between nations. That peace is also brokered by the rights of those who are members of nations. Again the atomisation of the self that chips or blasts away at historical roles and traditions is built into the process. Time is just a passage to fulfilment. If possible everything should be instant, timeless. Socio-ethical constructivism of the geometrical sought of Locke, Spinoza and Kant is the companion of acceleration noted by Marx to lie at the heart of capitalism, and hence liberal societies. Under liberalism 'things' do not need their own time as do all of our stages and roles in pre-liberal societies.

In the above description of liberalism I have been talking about liberalism as a theory, that stands in an extremely close theoretical relationship to modern classical physics as to classical modern metaphysics. Modern classical physics was very much the fruit of the new Adam, and the just as the old Adam named the creatures and world around him, the modern classical philosophy (as we examined in detail above) appealed to the vast blankness of 'experience' and to the all-important faculty of the 'understanding' so that the new correct names would replace the old traditional (and hence misleading) ones. Hobbes *Leviathan* and Spinoza's *Ethics* are the paradigmatic examples of such social applica-

tion of the understanding being applied afresh to the practices and emotions, drives, and sentiments which make us what we are and which are the building blocks that government must work with.

The hiatus, though, between liberalism as a constitutional 'feature' as opposed to a philosophical 'essence' is extremely important. Hayek's invocation of the difference between 'spontaneous or *catallactic* order' and 'constructivism' or '*taxical* order' is apposite: the all-important difference being that the taxical system is as good as the limitations of the planner/s as opposed to the catallactic system in which new information and hence new possibilities become revealed and generated in action.[12]

If one were to tell the story of the emergence of the liberal features of social reality—as opposed to a purely ideological 'idea'—one would be embroiled in all manner of anticipations and legacies—mention of the Hanseatic league would not be mistaken, nor the Magna charter, nor the Italian republics as Skinner and Pocock emphasize, nor, as François Guizot, Brian Tierney, Christopher Dawson, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, his student Harold Berman, and more recently Larry Siedentop[13] (to take a very small representative sample) have persuasively argued, the Medieval and canonical roots of representative governments, constitutions and Western legal systems. But there would just as significantly be the story of the Reformation, in general, with its freedom of conscience,

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[12] See chapter 2 of Friedrich von Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 35-54.

[13] J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition,* (Princeton: Princeton Uni. Press, 2003), Quentin Skinner *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, 2 volumes, The Renaissance and The Age of Reformation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), Francois Guizot, *History of Civilization in Europe*, (Liberty Fund, 2013), Brian Tierney, *Religion, Law and the Growth of Constitutional Thought, 1150-1650*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, (New York: double Day, 1957), Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Out of Revolution: Autobiography of Western Man*, (Oxford, Providence: Berg, 1993), Harold Berman, *Law and Revolution Vol. 1, The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition,* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism*, (Cambridge Massachusetts: Belknap. 2014.

mass literacy, of the key role of Calvinism, not only as harbinger of the 'spirit of capitalism' (something contested, but not refuted), but as a force for freedom from Geneva through France to the Netherlands, Scotland, England, and America.[14] In such a story 'constructivists' such as Hobbes, Locke, Spinoza, Rousseau, etc. will invariably feature, but the story of European societies, to repeat, is one in which liberal practice and liberal theory feature: but it is not one in which either has a blank canvass. Political ideas are always adapting to circumstances. Thus it is that thinkers like Montesquieu and Burke can broadly be classified as liberal thinkers, although their sensitivity to institutions and historicity, make them in significant ways the antithesis of the constructivist model I described earlier. This kind of liberalism is one that is astute to the importance of temporal cultivation. I stress my argument is not that it is simply wrong to want certain liberal 'goods'—such as freedom of speech, the right to property, the right to a fair trial, etc., when they are absent in a society, it is that the gap between the idea of what is desired and the actuality of their absence is one in which the transformation of existing interest and practices will have to occur through and over time. New practices, policies and laws release all manner of unknowns: the simplistic notion that an idea can be placed upon a people through the correct uses of the levers of 'government' betrays a failure to factor in the unpredictable character of human response to what they do not want—for in any society introducing something new will require those benefiting from the old ways will have to be changed/sacrificed. Further, in the restructuring of institutions there also needs to be transformation of behaviours which show a 'fit' between institution and people. Kemalism, in Turkey, for example is a classic example of the danger of the hiatus between the desire to implement modern 'goods' and a people's willingness to sacrifice their 'world' and 'selves' to achieve those

[14] Again the literature is vast and includes such classics as Hegel's account of the reformation in his *Philosophy of History*, Ernst Troeltsch's *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, and Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Two more recent works are particularly deserving of mention: Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Revolution: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap, 2012), and Harold Berman, *Law and Revolution, Vol. 2 The Impact of the Protestant Reformation on the Western Legal Tradition*, (Cambridge Massachusetts: Belknap, 2006).

goods. Kemalism was modern rather than liberal—but much of its illiberalism stemmed not from any desire to put people in prison without trial, but because it could not achieve the aims for a modern secular Turkey without coming into serious conflict with people who wanted another kind of future, who did not want to be part of a future in which the things they held most sacred were being sacrificed. Politics is selection and sacrifice because social reproduction is selection and sacrifice.

What the above also takes seriously is the role of time in institutional and social transformation. Institutions are themselves means for founding and reproducing commitments and practices across the ages. Societies are as much their institutions as they are their peoples. Likewise, the perpetuation of a people is a circulatory process involving ideas and institutions: institutions are storehouses of ideas, much as is language, but an institution is also the means for creating and selecting behaviours and peoples. Ideas are real to the extent they are incarnations—institutions are the primary means that people use for incarnation. This is why no matter how pure an idea may be in its conception—the truth of an idea is only disclosed in its circulation and 'evolution,' which is to say, in its adaptation. A fine mind may glean the theoretical and unsullied characteristics and relationships that constitute an idea, but a 'great idea' is one which is loved over time, which commands obedience because the devotion and sacrifice that is required for its endurance is sufficiently provided. And it is provided by those who are nourished by it. This was a fundamental insight of Augustine who grasped that perpetuity was an argument in the favour of the truth of something. Of course, this is contrary to the Enlightened new science belief that people have lived most of their lives as dupes of the manipulative priestly cast who pedalled superstitious nonsense.

The reality of so-called liberal societies is that they grew that way, but the conditions of growth of liberty and what we call a liberal society involves all manner of forces that are not liberal in origin or even character. The United States considers itself the freest society on earth—but its freedom is predicated upon the highest rate of incarceration in the world, as well as the largest military spending in the developed world. European states have eschewed these highly illiberal ways of protecting their freedoms, yet their protectionist economic policies are no more liberal than US military hegemony, and the devolution by EU members of sovereign powers to the EU is not just related to, but predicated upon what is invariably referred to as a 'democratic deficit.'

While it is true that enormous changes have occurred within modern industrialized Western societies and states because of certain liberal features, it is also true that those liberal features have been compromised and fundamentally modified to coexist with the multiple social temporalities embedded in the complex of institutions which constitute any given society—even though, that coexistence may be only temporary, and even if the potencies of the liberal features may come to devour the very conditions which facilitated liberalism's existence. The most conspicuous and classic example of this today is the inversion that is taking place within so-called liberal societies due to entrepreneurship and economic efficiency being in the hands of an educated managerial elite.

The modern liberal democratic state (to use the conventional nomenclature) emerged in large part (and in this respect there is much truth to Locke) to defend the rights of property holders, which included capacity as well as land and capital, and their right to assemble and enter into contractual relationships free from the prerogative power of the crown or, as far as possible, 'rent-seekers.' In this respect the modern state—even though it was still involved in large scale enterprises requiring revenue for conducting wars, providing infrastructure, education, and supplying public goods to an extent that one can argue Hayek downplays too much. Modern liberal societies were societies in which wealth was a significant fruit of liberty, but the wealth of the common—the 'commonwealth'—was not strictly calculated in monetary terms. The market was an important sphere within liberal society in which freedom between investors as well as with those needing to sell their property/labour took place, but the rules of the market were not seen as transposable to spheres outside it—whether one is talking of the police force, schools, universities or hospitals, public libraries and so on. Of course they had a budget, and the budget was part of an overall stream of revenue. But it was acceptable that efficiencies in such areas were not solely calculable in pure monetary terms—that was largely because one accepted that groups such as criminals, students, the sick, were not only very different from each other, but were also very different from paying 'clients.' Just as prior to modern classical metaphysics, nature was not uniform, prior to the managerial transposition of modern classical metaphysics to every zone of life, economic calculability and efficiencies had to cater for the 'resistances' of public sociality. The everyday forms of life, which had their own social public character, did not exist com-

pletely outside of economic considerations, but they were sufficiently intransigent not to dissipate completely into them.

Attention to the vastly different needs of different spheres of society is closely related to the awareness of a society as a complex of variegations, which are not all subject to the same law—and they are not subject to the same law because they—have different social axes and circumferences, as well as different rhythms. Bluntly, and to repeat—they emerge out of different needs. Planned economies were indifferent to such variegations, and what was one 'science' of human action became *the* science of human action. It is true that there was a liberal seam of economics of this scale which was anti-socialist (von Mises's *Human Action* is the classic example),[15] but, as John Stuart Mill put the case in *On Liberty*, the real virtue of liberal societies lay in the inventiveness, creativity and spiritual nourishment that comes from what Mills sees as the nourishing creative character of liberty itself. It is true that historically the pursuit of liberty and the pursuit of commercial prosperity work in tandem, but the huge importance of religious freedom as a life and death matter in Europe and for what would eventually become the United States is indicative of the fact that one cannot simply reduce the history of the pursuit of freedom to the pursuit of wealth. Once, however, the state becomes an organ, as it is in almost every advanced liberal democratic capitalist country (again I am using traditional nomenclature) in the world for the *instrumentalization* of all its resources (including 'human resources') in order to maximize its wealth, then all other goods were to be sacrificed to the mechanisms of efficiency. The danger alluded to here was something that more or less united—in their fear—most of the social theoretical/philosophical minds of the twentieth century whether of the left or the right, as is evident if one reads Marcuse or Adorno, or Heidegger, Schmitt or Gehlen. Rosenstock-Huessy, who also saw this, in his *Multiformity of Man* formulated the problem in terms of the crushing homogenization of time that had become increasingly intrinsic to the mechanical processes of daily life (Heidegger makes the case metaphysically rather than sociologically).[16]

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[15] Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics*, (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1966).

[16] Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *The Multiformity of Man*, (Eugen, Ontario: Wipf

What we are witnessing in so-called liberal societies is an increasing instrumentalization of the spheres of human existence as part and parcel of a calculable totality subject to the stringencies and 'outcome' orientated plans of a class whose narratives of perpetuity have no need of knowledge about any other time than the instrumental time taken to complete a plan. Of course, this kind of time is purely mythical; outside of the narrative real time as a plethora of pluralities carries on: time taken to raise a child, get married, settle property after the divorce, or heal a cut, improve one's guitar playing, make friends in a new community, etc., all defy the homogenisation of the totally calculable compliant efficient society that requires the sacrifice of all manner of liberties. That such formulations as 'public scrutiny and accountability' are invariably invoked to justify the process of instrumentalization and the economic advancement of the administrations of instrumentalizers is symptomatic of the way in which speech about public goods can be the source of so much public ill.

This lengthy aside has touched upon the paradox that liberal societies have facilitated the death of the very feature that makes them liberal. The kinds of conflicts which I focus upon for the rest of the paper are, on the surface, of a very different order, and yet the one overarching commonality, is that at the centre is the spiritual disease of social amnesia—the social amnesiac has forgotten the very conditions of his or her own liberty and what that liberty may mean (and again I want to emphasize that liberty is only one good, not *the good*, or even the best of the goods, though it is precious enough if adequately connected with other goods). It is the same social amnesiac, most brilliantly captured as the blinking last man in Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, who simply cannot fathom a world different than the calculable machine like one that 'comforts' while spiritually killing them.

Leo Strauss's Neo-Conservativism

Typically the 'type' that drew attention to the deficiencies of the liberal understanding of time was the conservative. The conservative defence—if it can be brought into one formulation—is not simply that things would get even worse if a new order that was completely insensitive to the 'traditions' of a people were ignored and that new forms of

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and Stock, 2013).

authority based in reason alone would miss the infinitude of micro-reasons of social being, it was that the traditional modalities of power had been cultivated in time, tested by time, and confirmed over time. If modern classical philosophy attempted to rescue us from the fevered imaginations that had been the source of all the turmoil and torture of history, the modern classical conservative mind sort to protect us from the fire of youthful imaginations who tested the reality of the existence in which they unhappily participated by pointing to its actual deficiencies, as they simultaneously contrasted their grim or dull everyday world with the merely imagined improvements of realities untried. The classical conservative mind as found in Burke or in the twentieth century in someone like Robert Nisbet is ever mindful of the time taken and needed for the cultivation and formation of peaceful human association. The question of whether an institution is so rotten to the core that it is useless to defend it any longer will always be one with divided answers, and the reasonableness of the question, as well as the urgency which may accompany its particular target make it difficult, if not foolhardy, for anyone to be a conservative about everything. Whatever we may think of any specific set of practices or institutions, however, does not change the fact that their existence is completely bound up with people—people are as much the extensions of a faith and a composite of practices, followers of pathways opened by founders as they are 'individuals.' Cutting off a path cuts off people: it is no easy thing to do. For while the word identity is often overplayed in certain kind of political and sociological narratives, members of communities with thick entanglements, with tightly knit obligations and kindred needs and strictly modified behaviours are not, in the main, *the kinds* of people who can simply become something else. The communitarian critique of liberalism going back some thirty years ago rightly recognized that the atomised self of thin liberal 'communities' arises from a precarious and dangerously self-destructive kind of community.[17] It took a lot of time to create the members of the thin community of the ultra or, if one will,

[17] John Rawls and Robert Nozick, for all their political differences, both typified the 'liberal'—thin and rationally proceduralist—position that was fiercely criticised by Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Walzer, and Michael Sandel among others.

post-modern. (By a thin community I mean a community in which identity may make one similar in various ways but in which the strictness of obligation is relatively lax.) But it also took a very specific set of historical conditions to facilitate this.

While the liberal mind-set tended to see that mind-set as purely rational or a natural/historical evolution, and have tended to see the problems of rights and appeals that emerge for members of thin communities based upon characteristics such as gender, sexual preference, ethnicity, race, etc., as all-encompassing—global even—the neo-conservative mind set which rarely tolerate these appeals, nevertheless shared much the same indifference to the horizons of those literally dwelling in other times. In liberal communities the complex array of traditional duties had sufficiently dissipated into obeying the law and earning a living, that the particular identity issue, which for non-Western peoples, comes so entangled in and 'burdened' by other 'matters,' the kinds of issues which seem of such enormous importance in the West—gays in the military, a racist comment, ethnic insensitivity etc. count for zero. The blindness of the modern liberal progressive is a blindness to the very Otherness, the acknowledgement of which in the last decades has come to be the all-important touchstone of being progressive. The simplification of identity that has become quite 'normal' in our modern increasingly abstract and disassociated societies obscures the very character of what is Other. The neo-cons baulk at identities being formed around such categories as women, gay, race, etc., but they come up with their own 'thin community,' every bit as selective around a particular interest (a certain way of reading/analyzing and talking) and abstract as the modern liberal.

The reasons behind the rise and fall of neo-conservatism in the US are many, and the label itself refers to many, often contradictory thinkers. I do not want to rehearse here the entirety of what may loosely be called a 'program' but simply to focus on one central feature which separates neo-conservatism from traditional conservatism—the lack of concern for social time in the neo-conservative 'agenda' and the role of political leaders in cultivating a regime with an ethos to counter the nihilism, which they argue, liberalism inevitably fosters. In this respect, the importance of Leo Strauss is worth reflecting upon.

There has been an enormous amount of literature about Leo Strauss' role in neo-conservatism, and a number of Straussians such as the Zuckerts, Steven B. Smith, and Peter Minowitz have argued that

Strauss cannot really be classified as a neo-conservative, that, in spite of his identification of pathologies within liberalism, he was, not overtly political and/or nevertheless a 'friend' of liberal democracy.[18] I certainly agree with those defenders of Strauss who take umbrage at him being an enemy of liberal democracy; he is a critic of tendencies within liberalism which he sees as undermining the order necessary for liberalism's persistence—this does not make him a fascist.[19] Nor does his appeal to

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[18] Some critiques are by students of Straussians e.g. Anne Norton, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2004), and C. Bradley Thompson with Yaron Brook, *Neoconservatism: An Obituary for an Idea*, (Boulder: Paradigm, 2010). Others accuse Strauss of being anti-democratic to the point of Strauss's philosophy being a closet fascism—Nicholas Xenos, *Cloaked in Virtue: Unveiling Leo Strauss and the Rhetoric of American Foreign Policy*, (New York, Routledge Press, 2008), Shadia Drury, *Leo Strauss and the American Right,* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999) and *The Political Ideas of Leo Strauss*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), or a Nazi sympathiser- William Altman, *The German Stranger: Leo Strauss and National Socialism*,(Lexington Books, 2011). Some deny the neo-conservative connection e.g. Catherine Zuckert, and Michael Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), Fukuyama *After the Neocon*, 21-31, Steven Smith, *Reading Leo Strauss: Politics, Philosophy, Judaism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), and Peter Minowitz, *Straussophobia: Defending Leo Strauss and Straussians against Shadia Drury and Other Accusers*, (Lexington, 2009), and some criticise Strauss from a Burkean conservative position, e.g. Paul Gottfried, *Leo Strauss and the Conservative Movement in America: A Critical Appraisal*, (Cambridge University Press; 2011), and Grant Havers, *Leo Strauss and Anglo-American Democracy*, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2013). This is just the tip of the iceberg of the literature on Strauss.

[19] Drury's work is so bitter, shrill and inaccurate, as well as smug in its own political certitudes that it is easy meat for the Zuckerts and Minowitz. Altmann's book strikes me as bordering on crazy. Xenos is a more serious attempt, but it hangs an enormous amount on a letter by Strauss to his friend, the philosopher Karl Löwith, in May 1933, in which he said: "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." For the letter see Eugene R. Sheppard, *Leo Strauss and the Politics*

an elite of gentleman who love wisdom. The language may be patrician and antiquated, and the assumptions pre-women's liberation, but it is nonsense to think that any one working in an elite North American University is not a member of the same class. And it is hardly surprising that students of elite universities will go onto hold important strategic positions within the state. Also, while the tone of the Straussians may well be redolent of a mystery school, and they engage in the same kind of career stake strategies which are a fundamental part of the 'closing of the humanities mind'—this does not make them different to any other of the humanities 'gangs.'

But against those who argue that the neo-conservatives had nothing to do with Strauss, I think the case is clear that Strauss was deeply admired by a number of leading neo-conservatives, who may not have studied with him directly, but with his students. (This does not rule out the point that his defenders make: that Straussians have not all been Republicans—Bloom, for example, was a conservative Democrat, and Strauss himself voted twice for Adlai Stephenson.) Rather than enter into the squabbles of how many neo-conservatives who are said to be Straussians are really Straussians,[20] the following assessment of what

of Exile: The Making of a Political Philosopher (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press/University Press of New England, 2007), 156 n. 25. Xenos pays no attention to context, nor does he consider the variety of reasons why Strauss expressed himself thus. Moreover, Strauss may have been right—it is certainly plausible that a more effective strategic critique of Hitlerite Germany may have come from the right than the left. For this would have fractured his support base. But to suggest that this was how Strauss always thought about politics is, to put it mildly, far-fetched.

[20] Names that regularly come up—and get disputed about whether they really are Straussians—include Paul Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld aide Stephen Cambone, supreme court judge Clarence Thomas, supreme court nominee Robert Bork, Dan Quayle's chief of staff William Kristol, Leon Kass who was head of Bush's Bioethics Committee, Carnes Lorde who worked in the National Security council under Regan, and was named in Myles Burnyeat's which is probably the first piece to suggest that Strauss's teaching involved cultivating a conservative political elite. Myles Burnyeat, 'Sphinx Without a Secret,' *The New York Review of Books* 32.9 (May 30, 1985), http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1985/may/30/sphinx-without-a-secret/?page=3 last accessed October 9 2014.

Gertrude Himmelfarb, the wife of the leading intellectual neo-conservative figure, Irving Kristol, believes her husband saw in Strauss is for me the common ground between Strauss and the neo-conservatives that concerns me:

> what impressed him [about Strauss] was not so much their political views (which were more implicit than overt) but the mindset that informed their discourses upon culture, religion, society, philosophy, and politics alike. His review of *Persecution and the Art of Writing* focuses on Maimonides as the exemplar of Strauss's major themes: the relation of the esoteric and the exoteric, of reason and revelation, of philosophy and the polity. It concludes by commending Strauss for accomplishing "nothing less than a revolution in intellectual history" by recalling us to the "wisdom of the past."[21]

What Himmelfarb identifies is the core of Strauss—and she is right to emphasize the 'mindset' as the clue to the politics, rather than the politics as the initiator (which is what so many of his critics miss). But it is this mind-set that is, I think, the heart of the problem, specifically the indifference to social time. (In this respect I find my argument closest to Paul Gottfried's critique of Strauss.) In discussing Strauss, I also want to add that just as Strauss thought that one should always look at the best case arguments (something many would dispute he achieved say, in his analysis of Weber, in *Natural Right and History*, as a key representative of the connection between 'value-free' social science and nihilism), I think Strauss is by far the most sophisticated and significant apologist for timeless standards of the best regime, which the neo-conservatives definitely believed in.

Strauss' corpus is typified by his devotion to the best books and, what he considered, the best ways to read those books. His work was mostly written at a time when Political Philosophy was a very marginal discipline in the USA, and when behaviourism was by far the most dominant orientation within American Political Science. His approach was also shaped by the totalitarian forces he was reacting to, which, in the case of Germany had led to his emigration from Germany due to the

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[21] Gertrude Himmelfarb, "Irving Kristol's Neoconservative Persuasion" in *Commentary*, October 2014 http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/irving-kristols-neoconservative-persuasion/ last viewed October 8 2014.

Weimar Republic's inability to garner sufficient support to stave off Hitler's smashing of democracy. He argued tirelessly in favour of the philosophical life, and for the kind of regime that best protected the philosophical life—for he rightly recognized that the philosophical life was not a possibility within every regime. He also argued that positivism and historicism left a people with no standards to distinguish between the better or worse kind of life.[22] His followers all share this conviction. They also share the approach typified by Strauss in seeing great book as part of a great philosophical conversation which proceeds across the ages. In this respect, his approach is the antithesis of that deployed by J.G. Pocock and Quentin Skinner, which draw us into the prevailing historicities than facilitate political theorists such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke etc. Or to say it another way, for the Straussians great books deal with the great problems of human existence, and the diversity of philosophical responses is largely to be understood as a matter of nuancing perennial possibilities. Strauss was renowned for being veiled, or, as Myles Burnyeat put it, 'sphinx'-like.[23] And while Strauss, for example, in his controversial reading of Plato, which, his critics saw, made the drama carry a weight that enabled the interpreter to reach the opposite conclusion of what was usually ascribed to Plato (e.g. Plato did not believe in life after death, the *Republic* is an anti-utopian book, and there may be no forms), he was consistent in his anti-historicist readings of books that few could deny had had an enormous impact on history.

There is another dimension to his work that is of no small importance and it has been discussed in various ways—he was Jewish. I say this because although his 'solution' to the best kind of life and the best

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[22] The critique of historicism is a hobby-horse of Strauss, and is at the heart of Strauss's *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953). Also see chapter 2 "Political Philosophy and History" of Leo Strauss, *What* is *Political Philosophy?* (Glencoe, Illinois,1959) Cf. Paul Norton, "Leo Strauss: His Critique of Historicism" in *The Modern Age*, Spring 1981, 143-154.

[23] For what it is worth, I confess that my response to Straussian readings of 'great books' is akin to Burnyeat's: while I find the range of Strauss's learning 'formidable and impressive,' the yields strike me as frequently banal and, even more frequently, wrongheaded. Straussian readings tend, for me, to make a Straussian of every great philosopher—or as Burnyeat puts it: Strauss's reading "presupposes what it seeks to prove."

kind of regime was not the Jewish 'solution' of faith in revelation, although the Jewish problem is not obvious in his 'political answers,' his political solution certainly provides an answer. Namely, the Jewish people will more likely be safe in a society that is not plagued by any revelation or tradition which is anti-Jewish—as both Christianity and Islam, albeit in somewhat different ways, are—but which takes its bearing from a standard of cultivated philosophical nobility.

That this is behind Strauss' reconciliation of the tensional problem of revelation and outlandish is far more plausible than the outlandish thesis by Shadia Drury that Strauss is a nihilist. Her conjecture—presented as fact—fails to take seriously the value that Strauss himself places upon the philosophical life as a conversational life and the need to dwell within a regime that protects that life—as well as the far less dramatic truth which Strauss firmly held to: that no matter how much we know it amounts to rather little. Strauss was able to make the case that that the thoughtful person will always be in danger if the worst rule, and the society which protects the thoughtful person will also have to protect those who are not necessarily thoughtful, but accepting of the opinions which will best preserve a more well-ordered regime. Strauss's political commitment to liberal democracy generally and America, in particular, was akin to Socrates's to Athens—where else would he be able to do what he did? But with the caveat that America's freedom extended to religious freedom. The historical contingencies behind the institutional character of the United States of America are, to put it mildly, not explored by Strauss (which is the core of Grant Havers' conservative and thoughtful critique of Strauss.) In Strauss and his followers the question of the emergence, circulation and institutionalisation of 'ideas' is put side as one inspects their philosophical sophistication, which invariably also involves distilling the esoteric (the teaching from the wise few) from the exoteric (the open face of the text).[24] What matters are 'great books.'

Just as Aristotle demands a commensurability between cause and effect, Strauss seeks a philosophical great source for a great political benefit.

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[24] The distinction is a central one to Strauss, and indicates the important of *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952) to his work as a whole. It is this distinction that facilitates the particular Straussian 'method' of discovering the perennial truths over and over again in the most disparate of works.

For the historian, the Straussian approach is almost unbearable: for it is as if the world is but the expression of a philosopher's sentences. The approach—again—ensures that what is good cannot be reduced to the contingencies that 'formed' it. I think the most revealing sentence of all by Strauss was expressed in a letter to Karl Löwith in 1946 where he says:

> I really believe, although to you this apparently appears fantastic, that the perfect political order, as Plato and Aristotle have sketched it, is the perfect order…details can be disputed, although I myself might actually agree with everything that Plato and Aristotle demand (but that I tell only you).[25]

No one who read Strauss with any care would really be surprised that he thought this—that Strauss would bury his deepest conviction in a letter as he lifts the veil to just one person is as typical of his 'esoteric' art of writing as the answer is of his belief in standards.

Let us concede to Strauss that in a philosophical question, argument and answer, an idea may be formed, disclosed, and seen which radiates across the times. But conceding this is not to concede that the conditions under which the question and answer were posed 'transcend' history, but rather that there are great commonalities to human sociality and formation, and they stretch across history. And some questions touch upon those commonalities—saying this does not necessarily mean these are the greatest questions, nor that they are the least. The fact of fundamental commonalities—the human need for orientation, the perennials of life and death and their interplay, survival and growth or extinction, good and evil (for are these not terms that relate to survival or extinction?)—is behind why there are common human responses that are not simply culture bound, but every-bit as much culture forming. Nor does this change the fact that answers long held may be ones that do not facilitate human flourishing. Indeed, that epochs are founded are invariably in response to the break-down of tried and tested ways of life that have persisted for a great duration only to find themselves as much a threat to life as means for it. That we live within epochs, that our world is institutionalised these ways rather than those ways, that we participate in certain ways of world-making, and that we are blocked from

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[25] Leo Strauss to Karl Löwith August 15, 1946, *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 4 (1983): 107-08.

participating in ways that may have been once wide-spread, these are intrinsically related to our historical being. Setting up a dyad of transcendence versus history and making that dyad one of the most important lines of division for reflection strikes me as very simplistic. Strauss wants to emphasize the value of a certain kind questioning, of not stopping within some pre-determined horizon known to the historian. This is Strauss' real bug-bear with historicism, but he pitches his complaint in such a way that our historicity drops away so that we may be open to converse with the great across the times in such a way that these works will speak directly to us. As an educator Strauss and his students took pride in the task of liberation from the consensuses of their own time.[26] But the attack upon historicism is an attack upon liberation from consensus; for seeing things as they emerge in time and adapt and transform over time (exactly what Nietzsche [a critical figure in Strauss' rejection of historicism] hoped the genealogical method would do) enables us to see the powers that work through time, and which we, as temporal creatures, are now engaging with. It is actually Strauss and the Straussians who corral the vast differences of philosophical responses and the trails generated by those responses into a consensus that happens to lead to what the Straussians believe is wisdom. Plato is the classic case. The Straussian reading of Plato can only nod disapprovingly at the neo-Platonists who were inspired by what the more sagely Strauss dismisses as of no real importance—the soul's journey of purification. But the traces of neo-Platonism thread through the very Islamic and Medieval traditions that Strauss venerated. Dante's *Comedy* is unimaginable without neo-Platonism, as is the poetry of Rumi. Works that seek to orientate and instruct—as the works of Strauss also do—do require wisdom, but that wisdom is also built out of responses to historical circumstances.

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[26] Thus the opening to the essay "Persecution and the Art of Writing," in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. "In a considerable number of countries which, for about a hundred years, have enjoyed a practically complete freedom of public discussion, that freedom is now suppressed and replaced by a compulsion to coordinate speech with such views as the government believes to be expedient, or holds in all seriousness." (p. 22). Of course, after the more radical times of the Strauss would have had to frame the idea of compliant consensus by appeal to some other agent of conformism. Strauss' student Bloom finds these new agents in pop bands such as the Rolling Stones!

Philosophers draw upon materials, examples, quandaries, and possibilities that are 'ready to hand' and that in their responsiveness generate more materials. This readiness to hand does not mean that unpredictable inventiveness is not also a perennial human capacity (that may be exercized and required more under different conditions). But nor is this a substitute for the powers that capacity works with. Strauss conflates simplistic historical determinism—which is based upon the falsity that the knower can survey all the variables of an age—with a consciousness of historicity which is alert to the need to take into account that we are surrounded by the times.[27] The historicism that Strauss relentlessly attacks is one which 'freezes' a reality as an objective reality that does not, indeed cannot exist as an 'object' as such. We only ever deal in bits and pieces, which is not to say that we cannot discriminate—on the contrary we *must* discriminate. We live chronologically but we recall episodically—we retrieve this and that aspect from our past, we form narratives based on small 'amounts,' the narratives require constant nuancing as we discover more—but who retains all in one's head? The ethical context of Levinas' criticism of Hegelianisms aside, Hegel is absolutely correct to emphasize that we would literally have no idea about anything if we simply dissolved all into the 'bad infinite'—an idea, a name demands some kind of closure, some means of binding relationships together so that a pattern is addressed and socially circulated. Of course, names and ideas are capable of re-appraisal—generations frequently have to 'take stock' of their world, especially after great catastrophes, and new directions of future making are undertaken.

History is invaluable but it is a different kind of reality from that mechanistic totality of law-governed forces with which the classical modern metaphysicians were preoccupied. It is on the one hand, an ever constant present: alive in our institutions, our memorials, our calendars, our holidays, the very names a community appeals to and venerates which are threaded and powerfully incubate within language, as meanings become tarnished only for some event to reawaken an interest or appeal that has been forgotten. On the other, hand history is also a

[27] Cf. also Claes G. Ryn, "Leo Strauss and History: The Philosopher as Conspirator," *Humanitas*, vol. XVIII, Nos. 1 & 2, 2005 http://www.nhinet.org/ryn18-1.htm last viewed october 8 2014.

swamp into which we constantly are forced to make retrievals, and further clarifications. We dive or reach back into history to uncover something that may help make sense of now, and where we might be going; we try to reassemble the various 'retrievals' we have come up with. The very complexity of the process combined with the pure vastness of what is to be retrieved and the time required to know the past is why being a historian is, in the main, a professional career, and also why historians no more agree about the main causes of an event, or the main lessons to be learned from an event, than specialists in any other discipline where human symbols and narratives inevitably must contravene the more fundamental mathematical-laboratory style reduction.

Our actions take place chronologically, but, to repeat, we think episodically. Moreover, it is not just the past that pushes us on (our trajects as Rosenstock-Huessy calls them), it is the hopes and decisions, in part, directing and giving shape to a future which both beckons and reveals itself to us (though just as we cannot grasp the totality of the past or present we cannot grasp the totality of all that 'feeds' into the future). If we knew everything we would know nothing unless we knew how to order, i.e. rearrange and transform 'history,' i.e. what happened, into 'History,' our story about what happened. The filtering problem is conjoined, as Nietzsche has perhaps most famously put the case in his attack upon the philistinism of David Strauss, by the urgency and importance of our need to know the past, to draw from it to make—and indeed to be made by the future. Our historical appeals require that we enter deeply into deeply alien life-worlds with their own historicity, which also connects to our historicity. We are never simply being a mirror, i.e. never completely objective.[28]

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[28] J.G.A. provides a neat account of this in his dialogue between Ego and Alter in 'Political ideas as historical events: political philosophers as historical actors' in his *Political Thought and History*, *Political Thought and History: Essays on Theory and Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 51-66. The danger of contextualism is that the synchronic completely subverts the diachronic: that speech takes us through time and forms our times is no less important than that a speech is formed in time. For Pocock's critique of Strauss—he finds him "marvellously perceptive in some ways as well as marvellously wrong-headed in others," (pp. 385-6), see his "Prophet and Inquisitor," *Political Theory*, 3.4 (November 1975), 385-401.

We are in the existential condition where we cannot help be swept along by history as a plethora of living—radiating, incubating—powers, which is also to say that a generation and its members are never completely in control of their social world. But we are also in the condition that we never see very much of what it is sweeping us along. We build with the available contingencies, the selected episodes that we feel we sufficiently grasp to facilitate our bit of world-making. But then there is one more aspect that complicates everything even more—and I have been alluding to this throughout: the so called 'we' I have been speaking of is temporally formed as well as only ever relatively stable, at least in the social formations which contain greater freedoms and social diversities. What exists in time is always co-existence, albeit the collective also contains all manner of appeals and diversities hat adjudicate on the respective values of different foundings and ultimate sources that govern us in our respective identities. Just as our consciousness enables us a synoptic 'grasp'—a we recall Hegel's *Begriff* 'contains' or is formed by *greifen*—we are ever implicated in and taking on roles in which we ourselves move through the times. The Orthodox priest or believer, the Catholic priest or believer, the pastor and Protestant believer, the convinced atheist are all appealing to and formed by different events, which is to say different social times—they co-exist, but their coexistence may or not be hospitable, as other forces (and I am not even speaking of direct conflict here). One only has to be cognizant of how rare it is now days compared with forty years ago to see a nun in a cornette and habit to realize what a large 'slice' of time has been diminished or cast aside. This diminution of a time is occurring constantly—and, of course, is accelerating under modern conditions. It is precisely because this is such a part of our reality that reference to 'culture' strikes me as a less astute way of taking the diverse realities into account.

The intensity of colliding foundations and hence colliding times may be dissipated over time—this is typically, but not necessarily, the case when extremely antagonistic life-worlds, which may have been 'purchased' with much blood and suffering are able to survive alongside each other for great periods of time. But that a particular event spanning a particular environment leads to the amelioration of tensions and hostilities which were once matters of life and death, and that subsequent generations can participate in, even benefit from a plurality of foundations and events and live peacefully with the diverse 'time-bodies' with

their shared symbolic stock is because a sufficiently strong sense of 'we' emerged out of subsequent collisions; many times became one time, but the one overall concordant time still 'moves' with multiple and diverse social memories; and the outbreak of old hostilities is not an impossibility. The greatest naivety is to think that the means of concordance that one social/political formation has been able to achieve can simply be replicated anywhere—for everywhere has its own time dynamics and conflicting foundations and time-bodies. This is the price of social complexity and survival.

The attunement to the very different temporalities at work within an age and place is not in contradiction with larger scales of temporal unity at work. Again I think Rosenstock-Huessy makes this case extremely powerfully, especially in his writings on revolutions, as he notes the way in which the great European revolutions have circulated beyond themselves and the World wars drawn us into planetary contiguities previously non-existent. Thus it is also not surprising that we must simultaneously be ever more conscious of universal history *and* local histories—both disclose fundamental realities of our being in time.

With this in mind, I wish to follow up on one last criticism of the Straussian approach to Political Philosophy, which in large part is due not just to Strauss, but to Philosophy itself, but which is even more clearly problematic for the Straussians in so far as they believe that their conversations take their orientation from the eternal standards they invoke in their readings. The Straussian accepts the great philosophical promise of a great resolution—even, if for the unphilosophical populace, they think that cooperation with a more easily comprehensible myth is part of any regime's duty of care. The notion of the potentially rational resolution available to all who have the capacity to philosophize aright has always been the un-kept promise of philosophy. It raises the all-important questions: why can't it keep its promise and what does it mean that it cannot? When I say it cannot keep its promise, I simply mean that there has never been a philosophical school that has ever commanded total ascent to the open minded person using their reason: as well as philosophers one only has to look at judicial decisions involving supreme courts and the like to see the extent of the lack of consent, the close calls which divide ostensibly disinterested lovers of truth and wisdom. Ultimately I am suggesting that the reason philosophy never achieves this and the reason it never will is because every individual is embedded in a

matrix of multiple, often contradictory foundations, with their various trails and historical adaptations, and transformations that enter into narratives of identity and which are 'tested' constantly by new information and circumstances. These matrices may vary significantly in their complexity, but it is impossible to think of anyone in the modern world, irrespective of what society they live in, who is not implicated in matrices far more complex (I am not talking about sophistication, but the sheer accumulation of temporalities and foundings) than one might generally find in pre-modern people. The compensation for this situation is as understandable as it is unsatisfactory—Western modern peoples are increasingly abstract, and, paradoxically, as I have suggested from the outset, less historically aware, less given to looking backwards into the future as peoples. This abstraction is, as I have also suggested, woven into the modern ideological framings of experience and future. On the other hand, more is known about the past today than at any other time in history. But that knowledge is known by few and invariably is 'modified' by the abstractions of appeal and value which we find in such modern framings as the liberal and neoconservative narratives I am criticizing.

Contrary to the Straussian dissolution of reality into a number of 'great books' written by wise 'philosophers,' if we really want to diagnose the ills of a life-world and espy possible improvements, we must be attuned to the vast array of contingencies which contribute to them. While I have argued that there will never be a great philosophical resolution of the type such apodictic sciences as physics or chemistry may avail of because life-worlds are symbolic worlds, and symbols are temporally active—in assaying these 'worlds' one has to be familiar with the contingencies which constitute them. But this cannot be serious unless their genesis and character are explored. Political philosophy cannot operate at an extra-anthropological, an extra- sociological, nor an extra-historical level—attempts to do so are always subterfuges.

The identification of a rationally concordant answer to the good life presupposes an agreement about the way in which contingencies are valued in different life-worlds. This does not mean that certain common or universal features (the absolutes) of human sociality may not be identified, but the absolutes all too quickly find themselves in antagonistic relationships with each other. The Platonic way to overcome this problem was to make the good in itself the object of human inquiry—but while anyone can ask the question is this action, this type of life, this

type of person, this type of behaviour, etc., good? Even allowing for there to be answers to these questions, the answers enmesh one in arguments about tactics of realization. And the tactics of realization push us to ask after the character of the peoples whose lives do not conform to the idea of the good to be realized, why they love this kind of life more than that kind of life? Again the contingencies that are valued are concrete: it is not that any society is good, that any state is good, that any culture is good, that any family is good. We find ourselves implicated or enmeshed in institutions because we are social beings, but our social commitments and responses are not to abstract forms of experience, whether they are benign or tortuous and hence the way we deal with them, are contingent as well.[29] The real truth of an institutions and ideas is in their playing out—our capacity to generalize and infer, as with our capacity to question, is an important capacity, but it is not one that can do more than use the modicum of logic and the modicum of our grasp of the plethora of contingencies we consider. This is the problem that Strauss is just not very helpful for and which the neo-conservatives botched so badly. Having decided that liberal democratic regimes were good—for all its flaws the liberal was, so the argument runs, the best of the possible regimes—they did not deem it necessary to ask for who and for what and when and how? Aristotle is also a favourite of Strauss and his school, but Aristotle was a most cautious thinker about the possibilities open to a regime. He was not a constructivist and his critique of Plato on the family and property (a critique that Strauss thought [in my opinion, very dubiously] did not apply to Plato—because Plato was only making a utopia which he never believed in) was based upon a psychological observation. Different peoples are 'naturally' inclined toward the kind of life they are familiar with, and the kinds of satisfactions and duties which enable who they are to continue being who they are. This does not rule out societies full of rage and despondency and alienation, societies in civil war and the like.

The failure of the invasions and Bush-initiated regime changes in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the aftermaths of regime change in Egypt and Libya, and the ongoing crises in Syria, and the role that these

[29] Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre "Is Patriotism a Virtue?" in Igor Primoratz, ed., *Patriotism*, (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2003), 43-58.

policies had in facilitating, if not outright spawning, ISIS has a great deal to do with a complete failure to understand the societies the regime wanted to 'help.' The mind-set was simple: liberal democracy is a good, if we eliminate the obstacle to the good, then good things will follow. What they did not consider was how long it took to cultivate liberal democracy, how much suffering, struggle and sheer destruction was involved in the conversion of a people, or collective—let alone how long it took for the ancient institution of slavery to be eliminated in the West. This is the identical problem of liberalism, when it is constructivist. Philosophical talk is treated as if it is simply a matter of people changing their minds, as if their minds were unhinged from their being, and people were disinterested pursuers of the truth.

Conclusion

Liberalism and neo-conservatism are far from being alone in their inattention to societies as being bodies of time. I have suggested Marxism suffered the same ailment, and another area which has risen to prominence, especially with the relatively large and unprecedented numbers of Muslim immigrating to Western countries in recent generations is a certain kind of interfaith dialogue, which seeks a common spiritual core of assumptions around which to have meaningful dialogue.

It is no accident that Western ideologies and approaches, even solutions to religions problems which previously plagued Europe do not fly when transposed to regions whose peoples have different historicities. Different social memories involve different valorizations and different appeals. Reaching a large scale agreement about a form of governance or faith means that people are in the position to be orientated in one manner rather than another. The great transformations of peoples within the world are transformations within certain zones that sufficiently activate enough people to risk their all as their world is remade. But the differences in their making is what we have to live with. The liberal solution to that making has worked in Europe only after fighting off vested interests, i.e. people with life-roles and systemic stakes (members of classes) whose outlook on life and means of social reproduction were, in important areas, not compatible with a liberal world. It then had to fight alternative ideologies which also emerged out the debris of possibilities and types seeking some other future than they could envisage as desirable under liberalism. When we speak, the temporality

of our ideas (the names we invoke, the concepts we refer and defer to) is invariable veiled. Our grammar is but one key of time's social reality, but ideas all too easily can be spoken of as 'in-themselves,' and we, as Kant famously referred to in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and in the more limited context of a priori forms and functions of experience, easily take flight. In the air—'the clouds', as Aristophanes fittingly identified as the real locus of Socratic appeals—ideas can be matched against each other by our ostensible reason alone. But on the earth they are living and dying along with us, as much drawing us further into a future, by awakening us to respond to the calls from the past and across the present, as dwelling alongside us. All people's experience this—what they don't experience are the same calls and pulls.

At the end of the Second World the world looked as if it were on the brink between a communist or liberal democratic future. Not only did that prove to be false, but one ideology died (or as in China, transformed much of its essence into its opposite). As the twentieth century and twenty first century unfolded consensuses and narratives have time and again proven to miss the mark about where reality is heading: by the 1980s, Maoist Sinologists no longer had a place to call home, Soviet specialists became historians overnight, a small army of socialist academics became post-modernists when the Soviet system folded, and even religion found its way back into social science and International Relations. What has still persisted, though, as this paper has indicated across liberal and neo-conservative groups is a certain indifference to human historicity. The clash of peoples is not only a clash of times, of peoples who literally dwell in different epochs, who take their cues from very different 'events.' Thus, for example, although I think it no overstatement to say that the transformations that have been bought about by the fight against Nazism (whose essence is the holocaust) and fascism completely changed the direction of education, and over time the society at large and the policies of governments that have been responsive to a more 'liberalized' set of social values which take account of the rights of different 'thin' communities based around identity. The politicisation of the Humanities, based as it is on antipathy towards skewed power relations, that started to take place in the 1960s is directly related to the trauma of guilt in the aftermath of the Second World War—guilt by the children and grandchildren in Europe of their parents' fascism; guilt by the UK for their past imperialism, and guilt by the North Americans for

slavery and genocide of native Americans and their participation in the Vietnam war. By extension the treatment of indigenous, blacks, women, gays, marginalized ethnic and religious groups could all be read as subjects of oppression. I do not argue this is wrong or even defective, but such a template for studying the social world, which is built upon a certain shared set of normative values does not travel far outside of the Western world, even allowing for relatively small elites in other 'worlds' who do fight for social change along such lines. But if one assumes that an event such as the Holocaust means much the same to North Americans or Europeans as it does to peoples living in China, Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, Russia, one is missing the point. In placing the liberal and neo-conservative mind-set it does not mean, for a moment, they are exactly the same. The obvious difference is where they have stood respectively on military intervention.

On the other hand, I think it very obvious that while the liberal academic mind challenges militaristic hegemony, and scouts out hegemonic ideas that are complicit with a certain style of tradition 'US-Eurocentrism,' it is equally as obvious that the style of 'critique' that typifies so much of what has changed within the Arts/Humanities and Social Sciences in the West is one which inevitably privileges a hegemonic role for elite universities (now exacerbated by university global ranking systems) which cannot help but draw in people from different 'cultures' into a common time, that only exists amongst those who share certain core appeals that have been part of their own historicity. That the liberal mind-set has also attempted to be respectful toward different cultures is one of the characteristics that led neo-conservatives to cry 'relativists.' But this criticism is not really true at all. For the idea of respect for different cultures and peoples, which is indeed a feature of the contemporary liberal mind, is one which does not dissolve its appeals into the different temporalities and mores of peoples who do not share their liberal sentiments and sources of appeal. On the contrary, what it tends to do is emphasize the shared fundamentals between cultures. At the same time, there is a kind of consensus of 'good manners' which means that certain highly illiberal societies in which illiberal mores are strongly shared not be broached when talking about the culture of the Other. Thus while the Western liberal tends to see all his or her traditional institutions as toxic, peoples from more traditional societies, though they may be critical of which person or group holds power tend to be very loyal to their tradi-

tions, and certainly there are no signs at all from the Middle East or Central Asia that there is an overwhelming sense of guilt about whom their traditions have oppressed.

In conclusion, the point of alerting us to the different social times that are circulating within one world is not simply to bring everything back to tacit normative appeals of settled matters about right and wrong involving power, oppression, in-equality, freedom etc. but rather to draw attention to what we are dealing with. The urgent question of how we deal with essential and non-negotiable differences is a tactical one: and it does not preclude the need to do what liberals do well—excavate pathologies, cruelties and injustices, which are a deep part of the West's social being. But being blind to who we are and what we are and why we are does not help orientate us, nor make genuine dialogue between peoples possible.