Modernity, Nobility, Morality: Leo Strauss's View of Nietzsche

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Contrary to other scholarship on Strauss, this paper argues that Strauss understands himself as having decisively rejected Nietzschean thought. First, I hold that notwithstanding the agreement between Strauss and Nietzsche on the critique of modern culture, the defects of liberal democracy, and the flaws in some kinds of historicism, Strauss sees Nietzsche as unable to extricate himself from the trap of modern standards. Nietzsche's philosophy needs natural standards, but he denies that nature provides them. Second, I maintain that Strauss thinks Nietzsche differs from the classical standard of nobility and opposes the classics on the nature of man; for Nietzsche there are no natural ends. Third, I argue that in Strauss's view Nietzsche decisively rejects citizen morality and justice, whereas Strauss regards them as beneficial and politically defensible because they point the way toward his higher standard of natural right.

Scholarly treatments of Strauss's work have underemphasized the degree to which Strauss broke with Friedrich Nietzsche. Drury claims that while Strauss appeals to classical thinkers such as Plato, these classics "have been transfigured by Nietzsche" (Drury, 1988, p. 46), and she argues that Strauss thinks: justice is only conventional; one ought to prefer tyranny; the ends justify the means; and the classic natural right position advocates practicing massive injustice. She favors a modern natural law perspective and is dismissive of any view that does not secure moral *rules* as the peak of human intellectual and moral effort. While Drury recognizes that "Strauss *does* believe that nature provides man with standards," she mistakenly claims these standards do not have moral worth (Drury, 1988, p. 168). She attacks Strauss because she fears his thought will undercut her view of morality, and concludes that Strauss is profoundly Nietzschean (Drury, 1988, pp. 20, 95, 91, 170, 177; Tolle, 1988, pp. 467-470). Other scholars who lean toward the view that Strauss is heavily Nietzschean are Pangle (in Strauss, 1983, pp. 24-5), Gunnell (1985, p. 359) and Lampert (1986, pp. 9-10).

This paper examines what Strauss thinks is his intellectual relationship

to Nietzsche, whom he read as a *Gymnasium* student in Germany! What is at stake is much more than the intellectual development of Leo Strauss. By examining Strauss's view of Nietzsche on modernity, nobility, and morality, I seek to demonstrate the chasm that separates modernity from Strauss's classic natural right and to add to our understanding of Strauss's enigmatic "natural right" doctrine. Examination of Strauss's break with Nietzsche will help to clarify the meaning of the modernity which Strauss criticizes, the "natural right" base from which he criticizes it, and its relation to politics.

Strauss apparently learned a great deal from Nietzsche. Yet Strauss's mature life work dealt with the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns. At first glance, Nietzsche appears to straddle that gulf, asserting both an admiration for the noble heroism of the ancients and warmly embracing an extremely modern perspectivism. However, Strauss ultimately rejects Nietzsche because the latter fails to appreciate the difference between the intellectual and the philosopher. Further, Strauss thinks the flaws in Nietzsche are writ large in modernity, and therefore are responsible for the crisis of our time.

This paper will show that Strauss does indeed have a significantly different standard of morality than Nietzsche's and this leads the philosopher to a "hierarchy of ends," a "universally valid standard" which is "sufficient for passing judgment" on human actions (Strauss, 1953, p. 163). His doctrine is intended not to corrupt the city's vulgar morality, but to judge it from a higher, more noble, more moral point of view.

The Critique of Modernity

In this section I discuss Strauss's view of modernity in general and then assess the extent to which Strauss and (Strauss's) Nietzsche agree regarding the critique of modernity. I argue that although Strauss shares some of Nietzsche's criticisms of modernity, Strauss ultimately finds Nietzsche massively inconsistent and finally caught up in the web of modernity's flaws. Nietzsche, in his perspectivism and historicism, fails to solve the very problems he has diagnosed. I judge that Strauss in the end describes Nietzsche as part of the third wave of modernity and as responsible for the crisis of our time.

Strauss's critique of the standards of modernity is startlingly harsh. Strauss believes that modernity arrives in the history of political philosophy in a series of waves of thought which modify the idea of nature, eroding it and eventually destroying the classical idea of nature. Strauss sees modernity as destructive of the classical form of natural right which to him is intellectually the far superior standard. Strauss views modern political philosophy as inadequate because it presupposes certain particular views of nature (modern natural science) and history (historicism) which he says "prove to be incompatible" with that philosophy (1964, p. 1).

Surveying the first wave of modernity, we find that the attack on classical philosophy by Machiavelli, Bacon and Hobbes attempts the conquest of nature. Maximum control over nature is the goal for these early thinkers, who tended to reduce "the moral and political problem to a technical problem." They believed nature was the enemy, a chaos to be reduced to order. This wave continues with Locke's view that nature supplies one with "almost worthless materials;" everything that is good is the product of man's labor. The political order "is in no way natural;" the state is an "artifact," the result of "covenants." Strauss condemns this development as corrosive of the proper use of nature and natural right as a standard for good states. The enlightenment view, especially as elucidated by Kant, is that the ideal is not a natural perfection but is formed by man (Strauss, 1975b, pp. 88, 89). Nietzsche later extends this notion with his will to power.

The second wave of modernity was inaugurated by Rousseau who thinks that "man in the state of nature is sub-human or pre-human." Man's rationality is only an acquired trait, caused not by nature but by a long historical process. Denial of the importance of rationality to the nature of man is later amplified by Nietzsche, and a result of Rousseau's and Nietzsche's analysis human nature is seen as "wholly insufficient to give man any guidance," (Strauss, 1975b, p. 90) yielding a crisis in the second wave of modern political thought.

The third wave of modernity, according to Strauss, occurs with Nietzsche, in whom political philosophy reaches its second and final crisis, "the crisis of our time" (1953, pp. 26, 253; 1959, pp. 54-55). Nietzsche not only rejects nature as a standard for political order, he also rejects procedures for achieving proper political order. The classical solution, says Strauss, had supplied a "stable standard" by which one could judge actual existent regimes. However, modern solutions, including that of Nietzsche, destroy "the very idea of a standard that is independent of actual situations" (Strauss, 1959, p. 225).

The modern solution emphasizes tolerance which, in extreme twentieth century forms, eventually means the "abandonment of all standards" (Strauss, 1968a, p. 63). Strauss is harshly critical of modern philosophy, which he thinks degenerates into positivism and radical historicism. By historicism, Strauss means the modern doctrine that all knowledge is limited by its historical situation and that, since all ideas are relative to definite historical situations, they are not meaningful beyond that situation. Thus, no transcendent standard of judgement is possible. The modern solution is "utopian in the sense that its actualization is impossible" (Strauss, 1968b, 225) because there are built-in, insurmountable theoretical conflicts within modernity.

There is some justification for ascribing to Strauss a large measure of intellectual debt to Nietzsche. Strauss described Nietzsche as "*the* philosopher of relativism" who had faced its intellectual problems and "pointed the way in which relativism can be overcome" (Strauss, 1989, p. 24). However, in Strauss's

opinion, Nietzsche did no more than point the way; he did *not* reach some standard of nature. After steering Strauss "towards the supremacy of nature" Nietzsche inconsistently "bypasse[d] the supremacy of reason" and, misunderstanding the nature of man, did not find the stable standard which nature could supply (Strauss, 1989, p. 26).

Both Nietzsche and Strauss are justly regarded as severe critics of modern life, culture and philosophy. For example, both agree that there is a crisis in modern liberalism and that the crisis consists in liberalism's loss of confidence in itself (Strauss, 1975b, pp. 81, 98). Further, Strauss agrees with Nietzsche that science, the up-to-date aesthetic ideal, does not supply any meaning for life, because science is unable to give an adequate theoretical or philosophical defense of itself. A general process of democratization in the modern world has encouraged scholars and scientists to declare their independence from philosophy. Both thinkers recognize this attempt at independence from philosophy as a disaster (Strauss, 1967, I: p. 2, IV: p. 4, VIII: p. 5, IX: pp. 2-3, XVI: p. 14).

Both provide radical criticisms of the culture and stature of modern man. Nietzsche in particular talks about the danger of the last man, by which he means the most degraded individual, the individual with no soul. Strauss also sees philosophical and intellectual problems with modern culture. The degradation after the last wave of change in modern philosophy is, for Strauss, evidenced by its descent into positivism and historicism (Strauss, 1975b, pp. 81-83; 1953, p. 34). Strauss appears to have been influenced by Nietzsche's rejection of the modern world. However, Strauss finds Nietzsche's understanding deficient in that Nietzsche did *not* complete his vision with a classical conception of nature and of truth (Strauss, 1983, p. 145; 1967, IX: p. 6, X: p. 8; II: p. 3; 1953, pp. 34, 252-3, 320-1; 1975b, p. 94; 1959, p. 241).

Both agreed philosophy had become politicized during the period of the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries. Even Nietzsche saw that the politicization of philosophy was in large part at the root of our troubles as he criticized the writings of all previous philosophers for having been motivated by a will to power rather than a will to understand (Strauss, 1953, p. 34). However, Nietzsche's own philosophy of the will to power leaves modern society in the same tangled web of politicization, degeneracy, and arbitrarily shifting standards in which he found it.

Both Nietzsche and Strauss attacked nineteenth century historicist thinking as destructive of horizons or comprehensive views. Because people live in a protective atmosphere that is opinion-based, cultural and religious (Strauss, 1953, p. 26), such historicism undermines the foundation of human community by asserting the relativity of comprehensive views, thus deprecating their value and destroying the protective atmosphere for life and for culture.

However, Nietzsche's critique of modernity fails to evade the defects of modernity it has discovered. Modernity at its beginning understood itself "in

contradistinction to antiquity.'' In Strauss's view, Nietzsche's thought is in the third wave of modernity, fundamentally part of the modern project and not part of premodern philosophy (Strauss, 1975b, pp, 93, 94). Strauss claims this third wave of modernity involves a new understanding of the sentiment of existence; it involves the sense ''of terror and anguish rather than of harmony and peace'' and it regards man's ''historic existence as necessarily tragic.'' Strauss views the era from Rousseau through Nietzsche as ''the age of an historical sense'' (Strauss, 1975b, 94, 95). In the end, Nietzsche is found to possess the historicist vision which Strauss so roundly condemns (1953, p. 26 and generally chapter 1).

Strauss thinks that because ''modern western man no longer knows what he wants'' and ''no longer believes that he can know what is good and bad,'' modernity faces a philosophical crisis. To him, Nietzsche's critique of modernity sees society as in a ''new situation'' which calls for a ''new nobility,'' that ''of the over-men'' (Strauss, 1975b, pp. 81, 82; 1983, p. 33; 1967, XIII: 5). Nietzsche believes the modern situation is a period of the ''greatest danger'' and, therefore, of the ''greatest hope'' for the superman of the future (Strauss, 1983, p. 33).

Strauss, on the other hand, thinks the human situation in this century has not essentially changed from the time of Plato, and the solution is to go back to conceptions of nobility developed in classical antiquity. Although there has been much degradation of modern humanity, there will always be a few persons who will distinguish themselves as philosophers.

Rather than calling for the transfiguration of mankind, Strauss instead suggests that the one thing needed is much more modest: the coaxing and training of potential philosophers toward philosophy as it was traditionally understood -- the philosophy of the Platonic Socrates. Like Nietzsche, Strauss preaches against the degeneracy in modern culture, but he sees the roots of the problem in ''modern political philosophy,'' which he thinks includes Nietzsche. Strauss's concern is to turn modern life away from barbarization and toward an aristocratic noble-souled philosophy as found in ancient Greece (Strauss, 1975b, p. 82; 1968b, p. 63).

Nietzsche's criticism suggested a way to overcome the crisis in modernity, but Strauss thinks Nietzsche ultimately remained part of that crisis (Strauss, 1983, p. 185; 1967, IX: p. 6, X: p. 8, II: p. 3; 1953, pp. 34, 252-253, 320-321; 1975b, p. 94; 1959, p. 241). This is because Nietzsche's critique contained within it no adequate solution, as he provides no standards, neither from history nor from nature, which point to how we can get out of our current situation.

Nietzsche ''committed the fatal mistake,'' says Strauss, of ''ignoring the essential difference between intellectuals and philosophers.'' The latter pursue truth and wisdom, while intellectuals merely manipulate ideas without any necessary commitment to some intrinsic value. When Nietzsche criticized previous philosophers, he was actually criticizing intellectuals, and thus showing an ignorance of true philosophy as Strauss understands it. Therefore, Nietzsche's revolt against modernity was, from Strauss's viewpoint, a flawed attempt at a

solution (Strauss, 1953, p. 34; 1967, XVII: p. 18).

Classical Nobility as a Standard

Strauss was preoccupied with the classics and derived his conception of natural right from the classical idea of nobility. His attempt to focus attention on understanding classical philosophers and to resurrect the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns, is intended to help us do our own philosophizing by helping purge us of beliefs which obstruct our understanding.

Strauss does *not* believe that a simple "return to premodern philosophy" is possible. His "revitalization" of classical philosophy is "meant as a correction for the specific shortcomings of the modern mind." The primary shortcoming is the attack on philosophy by historicism. Because modern society regards the idea of philosophy, or a final account of the whole, as "untenable," it has lost the original understanding of philosophy. Because of its belief that modern thought is "superior to the thought of the past" Strauss's return to classical political philosophy is "tentative or experimental," and his views cannot be used as "recipes for today's use." The study of classical thought must lead to a "revitalization" of philosophy as the search for wisdom (Strauss, 1968a, p. 257; 1952, pp. 157-158; 1964, pp. 10-11; 1946b, p. 332; 1953, pp. 10, 22-25; Tarcov, 1983, pp. 7-9).

Strauss grounds his idea of nobility on the observation that for the classics, political philosophy was related very directly to political life, starting with what the contending (pre-philosophic) factions and politicians say. To them, seeing that "a certain habitual attitude" or act is praised, is "a sufficient reason for considering that attitude, or way of acting, a virtue" (1975a, pp. 59, 78). The classical conception of nobility emerged without a philosophic tradition to mediate it, without historicism to distort evidence of "these experiences" (1953, pp. 31-32).

Strauss understands humans and human nature as in need of the excellent and noble. In his view, we admire excellence in things without regard to particular personal benefits. Some things "are admirable, or noble, by nature, intrinsically" (1953, p. 128; see Tarcov, 1983, p. 29). Because this is the case, there is no reason to despair even when we live in very harsh or cruel circumstances. As long as human nature is not completely crushed or extinguished, there will always be those "who will revolt against a state which is destructive of humanity." Human nature simply demands the possibility of nobility, excellence, greatness. "There is something in man which" involves "the desire for the genuine, for the noble, for the great" (1968b, pp. 223-224; 1960, p. 22).

While Strauss and Nietzsche both advocate striving for nobility, only Strauss derives his standard of nobility from the classical understanding of the nature of man. Strauss, but not Nietzsche, wholeheartedly agrees with the classics

that a "natural human good," built into man's "natural constitution," provides the basis for right or correct action. For Strauss, the good life would consist in man's acting in accordance with this natural order: "the good life is the perfection of man's nature," "the life that flows from a well-ordered or healthy soul" (1953, p. 127). Built into human nature is a "hierarchy" of goals or ends for human actions. This universally valid set of goals or ends is all that can be described, however. "There are no universally valid rules of action" (1953, p. 162) because the circumstances in which individuals act will vary greatly. This hierarchy of ends or goals sets both restraints or limits on man, and points to the direction of achievements and rewards.

The establishment of "modern" norms required a changed view of human nature: modernity, as with Machiavelli and Nietzsche, "understands man in the light of the sub-human" or beastial. Strauss grounds his norms in the classical view that humans take their bearings by their potentialities, the perfecting of man's nature. If there were to be a set of rules "circumscribing the general character of the good life," those rules could be called "the natural law," says Strauss (1969, pp. 295-297; 1983, p. 185; 1953, p. 127; 1964, p. 44).

This view, that there emphatically is a *natural* hierarchy of ways of life, is at the heart of Strauss's doctrine of natural right (1953, pp. 127, 162). Thus the way of life of the philosopher is higher than that of the manual laborer and artisan, and Strauss recognizes these different ways of life in terms of a hierarchy of ends found in the order of the soul. The method by which the Straussian "natural right" hierarchy is found, the Socratic *dialectic*, discovers that the things that are higher are, by nature, right (Strauss, 1964, pp. 38, 44; 1959, p. 91; 1953, pp. 162-163; Tarcov and Pangle, 1987, p. 924). This hierarchy of goals consists in qualities of human character and in the actions or exercise of those qualities. This Straussian natural right position is consistent with his further agreement with the classics that only the few are capable of being philosophers.

Both Nietzsche and Strauss are critics of modern society and culture; both, in part, look to classical Greece for material from which to construct a standard by which they will judge particular societies. Strauss believes Nietzsche, at least in part, looks back to Plato and the classics when Nietzsche calls for a new nobility, the nobility of the overman. When Nietzsche appreciates nobility or greatness, what he is really admiring is the greatness "of what man once was" and is not now, says Strauss (1983, p. 179). Further, Nietzsche's fundamental concept of the will to power includes an understanding of a human being who is "strong and healthy" and who is not merely concerned with self-preservation but rather with "self-heightening," involving an understanding of a hierarchy of the various types (Strauss, 1967, IV: p. 11, X: p. 3; 1959, p. 54).

Strauss apparently agrees with Nietzsche that the world needs even the least intelligent, and in Strauss's words the "almost skunkish ones" are "to be present for the sake of completeness and overall beauty which requires the ugliness

of parts'' (1957a). And Nietzsche follows the classics in asserting that human greatness requires ''harshness of limitation'' and placing philosophy and the philosopher at the ''peak'' of human existence. For Nietzsche ''the complementary man,'' a philosopher, is the one in whom all ''the rest of existence is justified'' (Strauss, 1983, pp. 32, 187).

Yet Strauss asserts that while Nietzsche needed the Platonic notion of a natural hierarchy, his connection with historical consciousness prevented him from accepting all of the Platonic view of nature. Nietzsche hoped that his writings ''would tempt the best men'' to become their true selves and thus to form a new nobility which would rule the planet. Nietzsche's ''overcoming'' meant to overcome the highest that had previously existed (Strauss, 1967, IX: p. 2, XVII: pp. 15, 16; 1968a, p. 236; 1959, p. 54). However, the highest class for Nietzsche contains very individualistic personalities. In contrast to the classical view, Nietzsche asserted that there would be radical differences of character or personalities among that highest class. Strauss, on the other hand, reflects the classical understanding of nobility, and thinks a natural standard unites those in the highest group.

Furthermore, Strauss thinks Nietzsche decisively undermines the classical idea of philosophy. Classical philosophy was ''theoretical,'' but Nietzsche's philosophy of the future is distinguished by the fact that it is more action oriented: ''it is consciously the outcome of a will.'' Nietzsche's philosophizing is based on a fundamental awareness which is not purely theoretical, but is ''inseparable from an act of will or a decision'' (Strauss, 1968a, p. 237). This belief significantly distinguishes Nietzsche from Strauss, who understands philosophy as purely theoretical in the Platonic sense (Strauss, 1959, pp. 11-12), and for whom Nietzsche cannot be the thinker who ''replaces Plato'' as the philosopher.

Nietzsche is dramatically at odds with the classics on the vision of the nature of man. For Nietzsche there is no such thing as a nature of man and there are no natural ends of man. He demonstrates this to Strauss in a vivid way by his ''denial of any cardinal difference between man and brute.'' In Nietzsche's new philosophy, ''the most spiritualized will to power'' consists not in following or maintaining harmony with nature but in ''prescribing to nature what or how it ought to be.'' Strauss believes Nietzsche's ''nature has become a problem'' because ''man is conquering nature and there are no assignable limits to that conquest'' (Strauss, 1983, pp. 185, 189, 190). In denying natural standards, Nietzsche's ''new nobility'' loses sight of the fundamental experience of nature upon which classical nobility is based, and therefore Strauss criticizes Nietzsche's modern understanding of nature as responsible for the crisis of our time.

Morality and Justice

The thought of Strauss has been interpreted by some scholars as asserting

the view that "justice is a fabrication, a ... convention". This view is partially true, but it clouds Strauss's distinction between the justice of the city (conventional or citizen justice) and "genuine justice," the standard found by the philosopher to inhere in the nature of things. For Strauss, contractually-established (conventional) justice is based on a "fictitious" argument and is found in all communities because actual cities are inferior to the philosopher's natural right. Strauss thinks wisdom entails full awareness of the natural order of things, from superior to inferior rank. He views wise actions as those responsive to the superior rank in nature. While Drury is correct that Strauss does not believe this natural hierarchy can be reduced to a set of "laws" or moral rules for conduct, she is unwarranted in concluding that this hierarchy provides no moral standard for evaluating action (Drury, 1988, pp. 77, 105, 168; Strauss, 1953, pp. 107, 119, 153, 162, 163; 1964, pp. 87, 102-103).

Strauss uses the word "morality" in at least two different senses: one is the vulgar morality of the city (which is found reducible to general rules) and a second is the philosopher's morality (the natural hierarchy of value which cannot be reduced to a set of rules). Morality in its first (vulgar) meaning is used in the way Nietzsche uses it: morality as the non-philosophic or non-thinking acceptance of the (moral) standards of a particular community. Strauss also uses "morality" in a second sense when he questions whether justice and morality as "they are required for the sake of the philosophic life" are the same as "justice and morality as commonly understood." Strauss's higher philosophic "morality," the philosopher's standard, clearly transcends the dimension of morality as understood politically (1953, pp. 151-152; 1946a, p. 3).

Strauss's model for the role of philosopher with respect to justice and morality is Farabi's description of Plato's advocacy of the replacement of the philosopher-king by "the secret kingship of the philosopher," who, as a private individual, seeks "to humanize the city within the limits of the possible." Yet this replacement of accepted opinions would not be gradual "if it were not accompanied by a provisional acceptance of accepted opinions." For this reason, philosophy, including Strauss's, must accept some mass opinions of the community. Laws require the consent of willing subjects and therefore always require a compromise between the power of the ruler and that of the ruled, or a "compromise between wisdom and folly." Moderation will help safeguard both philosophy and the city so that neither will injure the other (1952, p. 17; 1953, p. 152; see also Gourevitch, 1968, p. 302).

Strauss agrees with Nietzsche's critique of citizen morality and thinks with Nietzsche that each society has a horizon which is based in opinion and religion that is necessary for its survival. Strauss, like Nietzsche, believes that philosophers are able to see through the myths of mass opinion, such as the notion that the state is good and legitimate if the citizens agreed to its establishment (conventionalism). But Strauss does not agree with Nietzsche that the philosopher

must trumpet his extreme skepticism about the intellectual adequacy of citizen morality. In Strauss's view, true philosophers, like Plato, are not so stupid as to provoke mass doubt and lack of moderation, for doing so would destroy civilized social life (see Holmes, 1989, p. 1320).

Strauss advocates a solution which "removes a vast mass of evil without shocking a vast mass of prejudice." His natural right, while by itself "insufficient for guiding our actions" because it cannot be reduced to a set of rules or formula, is nevertheless "universally valid" and by itself "sufficient for passing judgement on the level of nobility of individuals and groups and of actions and institutions." Strauss wants to raise the level of a community's character toward the demands of natural right without "dynamiting" the society, without destroying the consent of the community for a particular set of rules (Strauss, 1953, pp. 153, 162, 163).

While Strauss, in general, favors moderation, justice and morality, Nietzsche, writing from the perspective of the individual, opposes these values. His writings led his readers to reject the major political ideologies, but after he accomplished that, Strauss says, "he could not show his readers a way toward political responsibility." In contrast to Strauss, Nietzsche's philosopher of the future is distinguished by the fact that his effort is not purely theoretical but is the outcome of a will to power. The effect of this effort is that of a "loose cannon" on human affairs. For Nietzsche, everything is permitted because there is no possibility of a natural right, no transcendent standard. This immoderation and lack of natural standards decisively separates Nietzsche from Strauss. Nietzsche was a preacher of immoderation because his analysis leaves no choice, Strauss says, "except that between irresponsible indifference to politics and irresponsible possible options" (Strauss, 1959, p. 55).

Strauss insists upon moderation for political orders and for social action. For Strauss, as for Plato and the Platonic Socrates, the philosopher's end naturally "demands" the virtues of temperance, moderation and social responsibility. While both Strauss and Nietzsche wanted the radical improvement of individual souls, Nietzsche's writings, Strauss says, were directed primarily toward "individuals who should revolutionize their own lives." Yet because there are social and political consequences to Nietzsche's thought, his views pointed to immoderation and irresponsibility (Strauss, 1967, XV: pp. 9-10; 1959, p. 54; 1975b, p. 98; Detwiler, 1990, passim).

Thus Strauss, *contra* Nietzsche, claims that moderation, morality and justice of the community are desirable. At the same time he also regards these qualities as of lower status than his standard of natural right. And while occasional statements by Strauss appear supportive of he position of Nietzsche (i.e., "in extreme situations the normally valid rules of natural right are justly changed") Strauss regards Nietzsche's analysis of public affairs as ultimately quite defective because it is fundamentally grounded in "the demands of the extreme situation" and it denies there is a "proper order of the soul."

Strauss claims that, while it is necessary to have special rules for extreme situations in order to insure the survival of the community, survival most of the time (in normal situations) is nowhere near the highest end or goal of the state. The example Strauss regards as an obvious case is that of "noble statesmen" who "are not blamed for actions which under normal conditions would be unjust." In Strauss's view, *contra* Nietzsche and *pro* Plato, it is *"only"* in extreme situations "that the public safety is the highest law," and this fact is "justly covered" with a "veil" (1957b, p. 4; 1953, p. 160). Strauss thinks the standards of virtue of a community serve to push citizens toward a higher end than mere survival; consequently, he teaches that these moral standards should be publicly supported by the philosopher.

Strauss uses his commentary on Machiavelli to criticize the Nietzschean perspective: moral virtue (for Machiavelli and Nietzsche) has "no other source" than society; "it has no second and higher source in the needs of the mind" or in human nature. Yet this second, higher source of morality is ultimately central to Strauss's own philosophy. Strauss concludes that the Machiavelli/Nietzsche position does not, and cannot, assert that moral virtue is a "requirement of philosophy or of the life of the mind." As a result, this modern position is "unable to give a clear account" of itself (Strauss, 1953, pp. 145-146, 160, 162; 1969, p. 294), while Strauss thinks both he and the classical philosophers can. Their standards are found in nature, in a hierarchy within the soul. Strauss argues this "universally valid hierarchy of ends" serves as the ultimate standard (1953, p. 162).

Strauss's claim that "the man who is merely just or moral without being a philosopher appears as a mutilated human being," appears very close to Nietzsche's thought. Yet Strauss is not condemning the moral life; rather, he is demonstrating the way in which (citizen) morality is incomplete. The person who is merely moral has not reached the highest, natural human potential, for while Strauss regards the moral virtue of the community (though vulgar) as a standard for most people and places a higher value on this vulgar virtue than on public opinion, it only occupies a middle position which *shows the way* to a higher and philosophic life based on natural right for all those capable of pursuing it (Strauss, 1953, p. 151; 1959, p. 36).

So, whereas in Nietzsche's thought moral virtue and justice are not pursued for their own sakes, for Strauss "justice and moral virtue in general can be fully legitimated *only* by the fact that they are required" for the sake of the ultimate end of human life, that is, they are fully legitimated *only* because they are the "conditions of the philosophic life" (1953, p. 151; italics added).

Strauss regards Nietzsche as "responsible for the emergence of German nihilism." For Nietzsche, "man derives enjoyment from overpowering others as well as himself." Nietzsche's vision of proper action for the individual is a vision of "cruel" action. Nietzsche "points most emphatically toward himself" and/or

toward the individual, but Strauss points away from himself and toward eternal things or toward the city, duty and public responsibility. Strauss advocates just action both on the individual and political levels (1941, p. 23; 1975b, pp. 97-98; 1983, p. 174).

Nietzsche favors the individual who despises the morality of contemporary society, and he advocates the creative change of its moral standards. Each individual creates his own morality, a moral standard valid only for that particular individual. So if morality is simply the following of a "rule that is valid for all men," then in this sense, says Strauss, even "Plato and Aristotle are immoralists," because they say that an individual's compliance "with certain rules valid for all men ... does not make man a very impressive figure." Most individuals must follow moral values for the benefit of the society as a whole. For Strauss, the mere following of rules is *not* what distinguishes the human being (1967, XVII: p. 11).

There is yet another fundamental difference between the views of Nietzsche and Strauss on morality. Nietzsche views moral judgments as fundamentally irrational, the result of the will to power of that particular individual. The individual simply claims or accepts them; they are not built into nature as standards to be followed. By contrast, Strauss views moral rules as having a high degree of rationality, though not as much as his yet higher standard of natural right (1983, pp. 182-183, 185, 189).

Nietzsche advocates immoderation and immorality based on his analysis of modern man and modern culture. This is a situation of the greatest "exposedness" of man and the "moment of the greatest danger." It is also, thinks Nietzsche, the moment of the "greatest hope," containing "the possibility of surpassing and overcoming all previous human types" (Strauss, 1983, p. 33; 1967, II: p. 4). The presence of this greatest danger is for Nietzsche the reason why he advocates immoderate action. However, Strauss sees a stability and intransigence in the nature of man, does not see the same level of exposedness, and therefore does not have Nietzsche's reason for recommending immoderation.

The two philosophers are completely at odds concerning the role of morality among masses of people organized politically. For Nietzsche's modern understanding of man's ethical position, "man differs from the brutes not by his rationality, but by his exposedness" (Strauss, 1967, II: p. 4). Therefore, Nietzsche castigates citizen morality and asks the individual to creatively exercise the will to power.

Strauss notes that Nietzsche's call to creativity and authenticity is "addressed to individuals" and in one sense the "political use of Nietzsche" misses the main thrust of the latter's work because he did not intend to provide prescriptions for society. At the same time, analysis of Nietzsche's ideas on society and politics suggests that his doctrines have profoundly destabilizing social and political *consequences* (Strauss, 1959, p. 54; 1975b, p. 98).

Conclusion

There are many similarities between Strauss and Nietzsche. Both criticize modernity for its egalitarianism and mediocrity. They both advocate an alternative vision of nobility and aristocratic society. They are concerned with the hierarchical ordering of men.

Yet Strauss believes he has broken decisively with Nietzschean thought. Strauss's mature life work dealt with the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns. At first glance, Nietzsche appears to straddle that gulf, asserting both an admiration for the noble heroism of the ancients and warmly embracing an extremely modern perspectivism. Only by understanding Strauss's ultimate rejection of Nietzsche can one understand the consistency in Strauss's critique of modernity. Despite contrary appearances, Strauss and Nietzsche do not share the same extremely skeptical view of the world. Nietzsche's skepticism ends in an intellectual's extreme perspectivism; there are no transcendent standards. By contrast, Strauss's skepticism travels via a philosopher's dialectic (he thinks Nietzsche is confused about the difference between an intellectual and a philosopher) and ends up with a "natural right" and a hierarchy of ends (or values) *in nature* which provides all one needs in the way of a standard of judgement. Strauss has an extreme skepticism with regard to the method of achieving wisdom, but not with regard to the ability of some to discover the existence of that superior standard, natural right.

Strauss thinks Nietzsche's reliance on the classical view of nobility is contradictory because Nietzsche does not agree with the classical emphasis on a permanent human nature and natural standards of right. Strauss sees Nietzsche as having been unable to extricate himself from the trap of modern standards. The modern view includes historicism and Strauss sees Nietzsche as having adopted its fundamental premise.

Further, Strauss sees a very large gap between himself and Nietzsche on the status of citizen justice and morality. For Nietzsche, morality is evidence of the degeneracy of Western civilization. Strauss believes the average citizen does not think philosophically and therefore needs a conventional right (supported by religion or accepted public opinion). He regards citizen morality as beneficial, productive of decency, community, civilization; yet the existence of Strauss's higher standard of natural right gives citizen morality a middle position pointing the way toward the philosopher's standard of judgement. In contrast, Strauss sees Nietzsche as advocating immoral perspectives and favoring the individual who despises the morality of society.

In sum, Strauss sees the differences between himself and Nietzsche as fundamental, and believes his break with Nietzsche is a move from muddle-headedness to philosophy. For Strauss, the glaring philosophic defects of perspectivism are ultimately disastrous. Although Strauss considered Nietzsche

one of the most powerful thinkers of the modern period, he regarded Nietzsche's thought as containing fundamental flaws. Strauss was ultimately willing to hold Nietzsche responsible for the crisis of our time, the crisis of modernity.

Notes

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1. It is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with the fact that there are other interpretations of Nietzsche, or that Nietzsche may have meant something different from Strauss's interpretation, because this paper aims to show how Strauss has broken with Nietzsche as understood by Strauss. Furthermore, while some have simplistically described Strauss's work as writing in codes (e.g., Burnyeat, 1985, pp. 32-34), the core of Strauss's teaching is *not* about the rules for the art of writing. Though he wrote on the problem of esoteric writing (Strauss, 1952, pp. 22-37; 1986; pp. 51-59), Strauss did *not* mistake the method of presentation for the message itself.

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