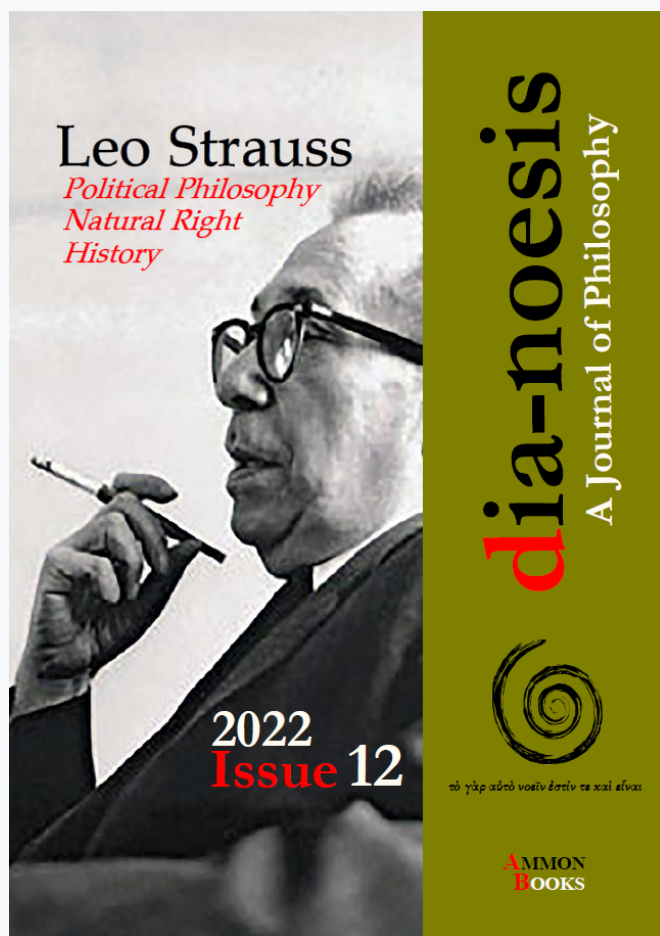


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Ernst Tugendhat and Leo Strauss: The Use and Abuse of Socratic Ignorance

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Abstract: A comparison of the way Leo Strauss and Ernst Tugendhat treat Socratic Ignorance reveals a political gulf dividing these two important thinkers. This comparison is based on Tugendhat's *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbstbestimmung* (1979) and two essays of Strauss, the pre-War "Religiöse Lage der Gegenwart" (1930) and the post-War "How to Study Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*" (1948). While Tugendhat points to Socratic Ignorance as a remedy against political extremism, Strauss illustrates how it can be made to subserve it. And while Tugendhat assumes that the threat posed by National Socialism has been checked, Strauss demonstrates that it still remains an ongoing danger.

Keywords: Leo Strauss, Ernst Tugendhat, Socrates, Socratic Ignorance, Second Cave

In 1930, the same year Ernst Tugendhat was born in Brunn, Leo Strauss first recorded his revealing conception of a 'Second Cave.' The reference is found in a

draft speech—it is unclear that he ever actually delivered it¹—to a Jewish Youth Conference on the topic ‘*Religiöse Lage der Gegenwart*.’ Strauss claims that we must recover the natural ignorance of Plato’s cave-dwellers by recognizing that our Tradition has made us prisoners of an even deeper Second Cave from which we must escape before we can answer or even raise our own questions.

Wir können aber nicht von uns sofort antworten; denn wir wissen, dass wir tief in eine Tradition verstrickt sind: wir sind noch viel tiefer unten als die Höhlenbewohner Platons. Wir müssen uns zum *Ursprung* der Tradition, auf die Stufe *natürlicher Unwissenheit*, erheben. Wollten wir uns mit der gegenwärtigen Lage beschäftigen, so täten wir nicht anderes, als die Höhlenbewohner, die die Inneneinrichtung ihrer Höhle beschrieben.²

What appears to be a very similar idea finds an eloquent expression in the final paragraph of Ernst Tugendhat’s 1979 *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbstbestimmung*.³

Die meisten vergangenen Zeitalter glaubten zu wissen, was gut ist, und die philosophischen Systeme, die in ihnen entstanden sind, glaubten geradezu sagen zu können, welches die Idee des wahrhaft guten Lebens ist. So auch noch Hegel. Wir haben heute diese Sicherheit verloren. Aber der Verlust kann auch ein Gewinn sein. Indem wir nicht mehr glauben im Besitz der Wahrheit zu sein, können wir die Erfahrung des Sokrates erneuern, daß uns der Ausblick auf das Gute im Wissen des Nichtwissens gegeben ist, und in diesem Zurückgeworfensein auf uns selbst lernen wir es schätzen, daß wir nach dem wahrhaft Guten *fragen* können.⁴

¹ See Leo Strauss, *The Early Writings (1921-1932)*, translated and edited by Michael Zank, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2002 (hereafter ‘LSEW’), p. 47, n. 93. It was to be delivered “at the federal camp of Kadimah in Brieselang, near Berlin.” I have profited from Michael Zank’s unpublished version of this speech.

² Leo Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by Heinrich Meier, with the editorial assistance of Wiebke Meier, Volume 2: *Philosophie und Gesetz: Frühe Schriften*. J. B. Metzlar, Stuttgart and Weimar, 1997 (hereafter ‘LSGS II’), p. 389.

³ Ernst Tugendhat, *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbstbestimmung; Sprachanalytische Interpretationen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1979 (hereafter ‘Tugendhat’).

⁴ Tugendhat, pp. 356-57.

The purpose of this paper is to show that the apparent similarity between the conceptions of Strauss and Tugendhat is just that: merely *apparent*.

The mention of Hegel in this final paragraph is hardly accidental: Tugendhat ends his *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbstbestimmung* with a powerful indictment of Hegel's *Machtidolatrie*⁵ that he has derived from the great philosopher's *Wahrheitsbegriff*.⁶ Although Tugendhat is less explicit about the historical connection in Hegel's case than in Heidegger's—whose *Wahrheitsbegriff* is explicitly connected by Tugendhat to the philosopher's Nazism⁷—it is National Socialism that has definitively revealed the dangers of endorsing what either Hegel or Heidegger regarded as certainly True. It is thus an extremely good thing, maintains Tugendhat, that 'we have lost this certainty today.' Tugendhat's Socratic ignorance is therefore being revived—and could only be so revived—in a post-Hitler environment: we know today that their Truths are false. Thus we can raise our own questions once again.

It is therefore not without significance that Leo Strauss was promulgating a return to Socratic ignorance *before* Hitler's 1933 *Machtergreifung*. In retrospect, we can easily see that the religious and *geistliche* 'situation of the present' (Strauss drafted another speech in 1932 with the word 'spiritual' substituted for 'religious')⁸ was very perilous indeed in 1930. It would have been a very good thing if Germans had been in possession of a few more certainties than Strauss claims are presently available. This becomes

⁵ Tugendhat, p. 355.

⁶ Tugendhat, p. 350.

⁷ Tugendhat, p. 243. The passage in question appears *verbatim* below.

⁸ See 'Die geistliche Lage der Gegenwart' in LSGS II, pp. 441-64. Strauss (hereafter 'LS') repeats the Second Cave image here (see p. 456). LS singles out "*die Tradition der Offenbarungsreligionen*" as being responsible for the Second Cave. "Die Tatsache dass eine auf Offenbarung beruhende Tradition in die Welt der Philosophie getreten ist, hat die *natürlichen* Schwierigkeiten des Philosophierens um die *geschichtliche* Schwierigkeit vermehrt. ¶ Anders gesagt (p. 456). LS then introduces the image.

especially palpable when one begins to consider what Strauss actually meant by the Second Cave.

To begin with, it is important to point out that Strauss does not refer to ‘Socratic’ but rather to *natürliche Unwissenheit* in this first version of the Second Cave (there are a total of *five* versions in his published and unpublished writings).⁹ In fact, he has just mentioned Socrates as one of those pillars of Tradition whose truth-claims have become, in his phrase, “*völlig fragwürdig*.”

Die Pfeiler, auf denen unsere Tradition ruhte: Propheten und Sokrates-Platon, sind seit Nietzsche eingerissen. Nietzsches Parteinahme für Könige gegen Propheten, für Sophisten gegen Sokrates—Jesus nicht nur kein Gott, auch kein Betrüger, auch kein Genie, sondern ein Trottel. Verworfen das *□□□□□□□□ und »Gut-Böse«—Nietzsche der letzte Aufklärer.*¹⁰

Belief in a clear cut distinction between Good and Evil, the undisputed value of the theoretical life,¹¹ Jesus Christ as

⁹ In addition to the two unpublished versions to which I have already referred, the published versions are (1) ‘Besprechung von Julius Ebbinghaus, *Über die Fortschritte der Metaphysik* (1931) in LSGS II, p. 439. (English translation, with valuable notes in LSEW, p. 215). (2) *Philosophie und Gesetz: Beiträge zum Verständnis Maimunis und seiner Verläufer* (1935) in LSGS II, pp. 3-123. (English translation by Eve Adler in Leo Strauss, *Philosophy and Law: Contributions to the Understanding of Maimonides and his Predecessors*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1995 [hereafter ‘PAL’], p. 136). (3) ‘How to Study Spinoza’s *Theologico-Political Treatise*’ (1948) in Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1952 (hereafter ‘PAW’), p. 155.

¹⁰ LSGS II, p. 389.

¹¹ What LS means by ‘philosophy’ is an interesting topic in its own right. See Leo Strauss, ‘On a New Interpretation of Plato’s Political Philosophy,’ in *Social Research* 13, no. 3 (September 1946) p. 332 (hereafter ‘NIP’). “What at first sight is merely the result of the demands of historical exactness [i.e. returning to the Ancients and understanding them as they understood themselves; see context] is actually the result of the demand for a philosophic reexamination of our basic assumptions. This being the case, insistence on the fundamental difference between philosophy and history—a difference by which philosophy stands or falls—may very well, in the present situation, be misleading, not to say dangerous to philosophy itself.” This self-contradictory text helps to show how historicist the doctrine of the Second Cave is. For a more widely

Savior, the evident superiority of Socrates to the sophist Thrasymachus,¹² and the prophetic insistence on the primacy of the Lord God as the only legitimate King of Israel;¹³ these constitute the Tradition in which we—although Strauss clearly exempts both Nietzsche and himself from this predicament—are *verstrickt*. It is a fascinating catalogue: I would argue that a firm adherence to *any one of these five Pillars of Tradition* would have precluded the adherent from giving to the Nazis the whole-hearted *Vertrauen*¹⁴ that

known definition of philosophy by LS, see Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1953 (hereafter ‘NRH’) p. 32. “No more is needed to legitimize philosophy in its original Socratic sense: philosophy is knowledge that one does not know; that is to say, it is knowledge of what one does not know, or awareness of the fundamental problems and, therewith, of the fundamental alternatives regarding their solution that are coeval with human thought.”

¹² Thrasymachus is the pivot on which LS’s interpretation of Plato turns. See Leo Strauss, *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism; An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989 (hereafter ‘RCPR’), pp. 40-41. “For while Plato had seen the features in question [‘the emergence of a new aristocracy’ constituted by ‘the philosophers of the future’] as clearly as Nietzsche, and perhaps more clearly than Nietzsche, he had intimated rather than stated his deepest insights.” LS’s claim that Plato uses Thrasymachus (and Callicles) to intimate his acceptance of “the evil doctrine,” see Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 1958 (hereafter ‘TOM’), p. 10. See Laurence Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996, p. 146, for the impetus of Alfarabi in bringing LS to this view (cf. RCPR, p. 159).

¹³ LS emphasizes this point in *Religiöse Lage der Gegenwart* but it is not to be found in Nietzsche. “Through Nietzsche, tradition has been shaken at its roots. It has completely lost its self-evident truth. We are left in this world without any authority, without any direction...The same with the Bible: we no longer self-evidently agree with the prophets; we ask ourselves seriously whether perhaps the kings were right. We really need to begin from the *very* beginning.” The next sentence shows how *The Concept of the Political* of Carl Schmitt could add a political dimension to LS’s Second Cave. “We *can* begin from the very beginning: we are lacking all polemic affect toward tradition (having nothing wherefrom to be polemical against it); and at the same time, tradition is utterly alien to us, utterly questionable” (LSEW, pp. 32-33). Schmitt will this ‘wherefrom:’ the primordial necessity of the ‘friend-enemy’ distinction itself.

¹⁴ Tugendhat, p. 349.

Tugendhat has shown to be the insidious political offspring of Hegel's *Wahrheitsbegriff*. Standing against them are Nietzsche and Strauss. Moreover, Strauss is doing so (as he wrote—prematurely even then—in the 1932 '*Die Geistige Lage der Gegenwart*') explicitly "*im Zeitalter der Nationalsozialismus*."¹⁵

But it is not only Nietzsche's influence on Leo Strauss that is decisive here. Although Strauss had been deeply impressed the first time he heard Martin Heidegger lecture in 1922,¹⁶ the '*Religiöse Lage der Gegenwart*' contains the first explicit reference to Martin Heidegger in Strauss's writings.¹⁷ An awareness of Heidegger's influence on Strauss is particularly important for understanding the 'Second Cave.' While

¹⁵ LSGS II, p. 444.

¹⁶ "Heidegger alone brought about such a radical change in philosophic thought as is revolutionizing all thought in Germany and continental Europe and is beginning to affect even Anglo-Saxony. I am not surprised by this effect. I remember the impression he made on me when I first heard him as a young Ph.D., in 1922" (RCPR, p. 27).

¹⁷ "Understanding conspectively, one in truth understands nothing, no matter how bright one is. I would like to adduce an example. Somewhere, in our time, there lives a philosopher, in the full sense of the term. Completely unknown *for five years* [emphasis mine: MH had published *Being and Time* in 1927 but LS had first encountered the then comparatively unknown philosopher in 1922; see previous note], today his name is the talk of the town. In his main work, the philosopher wrote, among many other things, a few pages about idle talk [*das Gerede*], what it means and what it does [see *Sein und Zeit*, §35]. He intended this as a mere statement of fact, and not as a plea of the author to spare him being made into the object of idle talk. What happens? A woman—the noble word lady is out of the question—reads this philosopher and, before she can have an inkling of what the man actually means to say, she gets up in London and chatters away. She certainly found the paragraph on idle talk "very fine," she understood it in this sense; but she did not understand it so, that it was time for her to finally, finally shut her unbearably shameful tongue. ¶ Hence: if one takes the great men seriously that rule the present, one will not consider a synthesis, a muddying, and a watering down of that which mattered to them" (Michel Zank's unpublished translation of LSGS II, p. 383). But the influence of Heidegger on LS is probably already visible in an unpublished 1929 book review called '*Konspectivismus*' (see LSGS II, pp. 365-75) where relativistic 'conspectivism' is contrasted (p. 367) with the motto of Heidegger's phenomenology ('*zu den Sachen selbst*').

Strauss points to Nietzsche as the one who has delivered us from its illusions, he is doing so in terms of Heidegger's 1927 call for a *Destruktion* of the Tradition in *Sein und Zeit*.¹⁸ As will become clear, this is a project Strauss continued—in far more dangerous *political* terms—long after leaving Germany.

Strauss's 1930 '*Religiöse Lage der Gegenwart*' is therefore one of the earliest indications of an important reorientation in his approach: the 1929 Davos Conference had been the turning point.¹⁹ As a fellow Jew and more importantly as his own *Doktorvater* from Marburg,²⁰ it was Ernst Cassirer whom one might think that Strauss would favor over Martin Heidegger in that remarkable confrontation.²¹ But the opposite was the case. As he wrote many years later: "There was a famous discussion between Heidegger and Ernst Cassirer in Davos which revealed the lostness and the emptiness of this remarkable representative of established academic philosophy to everyone who had eyes."²² He uses a very similar form of speech when he spoke, also many years

¹⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen, § 6.

¹⁹ There are two accounts by LS of the Davos colloquium: the posthumously published 'An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism' (RCPR, pp. 27-46) and another published in Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1959 (hereafter 'WIPP'). In a 1955 memorial for Kurt Riezler, LS describes the impact that MH had on the distinguished Riezler—sixteen years older than LS, already a published author, and one who had just given a talk at Davos himself. "Riezler took the side of Heidegger without any hesitation. There was no alternative. Mere sensitivity to greatness would have dictated Riezler's choice" (WIPP, p. 246). The use of the word 'dictated' as well as the ethically neutral 'greatness' to which LS refers casts a revealing light on LS's description of the events of 1933 in this same Riezler memorial. "Led politically by Hitler and intellectually by Heidegger, Germany entered the Third Reich" (WIPP, p. 241).

²⁰ See the 'Introduction' by Michael Zank in LSEW, pp. 6-7.

²¹ A vivid and illuminating account of Davos can be found in Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil* (translated by Ewald Osers), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1998 (hereafter 'Safranski'), pp. 185-88). See also Guido Schneeberger, *Nachlese zu Heidegger: Dokumente zu seinem Leben und Denken. Mit zwei Bildtafeln* (q.v.), Bern, 1962, pp. 1-9 (hereafter 'Schneeberger') for two contemporary accounts of the Debate.

²² RCPR, p. 28.

later, about his first impression of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*: "Everyone who had read his first great book and did not overlook the wood for the trees could see the kinship in temper and direction between Heidegger's thought and the Nazis."²³ This did not prevent Strauss from claiming in the 1950's that "the only great thinker in our time is Heidegger."²⁴ Although Strauss's followers prefer to present him today as a Liberal who deplored Heidegger's historicism and Nietzsche's nihilism, the Second Cave reveals the truth: it is the primordial *Ereignis* that allows us to find "an horizon beyond" the Straussian Tradition.

Ernst Tugendhat never mentions Nietzsche in his *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbstbestimmung*: perhaps this is because, unlike Heidegger, Nietzsche did not offer an alternative *Wahrheitsbegriff* (in place of the Tradition's) but directly attacked Truth in general. This difference between Nietzsche's frontal assault and Heidegger's flank attack through the Greeks—a tactical rather than a strategic difference, as it seems to me²⁵—is reflected in the Leo Strauss of 1930. Although he had come under Heidegger's influence, the influence of Nietzsche remained. In a 1935 letter to Karl Löwith, Strauss identified 1929 as the end of a ten year period during which, he wrote, "I can only say that Nietzsche so dominated and bewitched me between my 22nd and 30th years, that I literally believed everything that I understood of him."²⁶ But as the Second Cave indicates, Strauss had scarcely left Nietzsche far behind in 1930. It was rather a question of finding in Martin Heidegger a New Master. Above all, it meant Strauss's continuation of Nietzsche's project by Heideggerian means. Nor was this anything like an

²³ RCPR, p. 30

²⁴ RCPR, p. 29.

²⁵ Especially because Nietzsche had invented the tactic as well! (*Die Geburt der Tragödie*).

²⁶ The letter (of June 23, 1935) can be found at 'Straussian.net' by following a link to 'Strauss-Löwith Correspondence' (<http://www2.bc.edu/~wilsonop/lowith.html>). This particular letter (hereafter '1935 Letter to Löwith') is found on pp. 7-8. He ends the P.S. with the remark: '—By the way; I am *not* an orthodox Jew.'

unbridgeable gap. He would later compare the two in a most revealing manner:

The case of Heidegger reminds one to a certain extent of the case of Nietzsche. Nietzsche, naturally, would not have sided with Hitler. Yet there is an undeniable kinship between Nietzsche's thought and fascism.²⁷

The deep impression Heidegger made on Strauss in 1929 therefore indicates not so much a change of belief as a new course of action. This new course would ultimately, by a long and winding road, bring Leo Strauss to the United States where, through his students and their students, he has now become the acknowledged Master of the Neo-Conservatives and thus a decisive influence on the Bush Administration.²⁸

It will be seen, then, that Strauss's identification of Nietzsche as '*der letzte Aufklärer*' in combination with his application of Plato's Cave Allegory to Heidegger's ongoing project for the '*Destruktion*' of the Tradition—a Tradition that had upheld, among other things, the superiority of Socrates to Thrasymachus—shows that the recovery of *natürliche Unwissenheit* meant something entirely different to Leo Strauss in 1930 from what it would eventually come to mean for Ernst Tugendhat.

Strauss's major interest during the 1920's had been Political Zionism;²⁹ after 1929, his publications in this area abruptly cease. In 1931, he published a review of a book by Julius Ebbinghaus in the *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*,³⁰ it

²⁷ RCPR, p. 31. The passage continues. 'If one rejects, as passionately as Nietzsche did, conservative constitutional monarchy, as well as democracy, with a view to a new aristocracy, the passion of the denials will be much more effective than the necessarily more subtle intimations of the character of the new nobility, to say nothing of the blond beast' (ibid.).

²⁸ Although now out of date, see Shadia B. Drury, *Leo Strauss and the American Right*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1997. Also the new Introduction to the same author's *The Political Ideas of Leo Strauss*, Palgrave-Macmillan, New York, 2005

²⁹ See LSEW, pp. xii-xiv for a complete list of these. Zank's Introduction (pp. 3-49) is excellent.

³⁰ LSEW, p. 215, 'Notes.'

contained a much more Socratic (and consequently much less Nietzschean) version of the Second Cave.³¹ One would never have realized from it precisely which aspects of the Tradition Strauss is really trying to outflank between the lines of his humanistic defense of “*lesenden Lernens*.” This would set the pattern: extreme caution was required in this area, especially after Strauss left Germany in 1932. And Julius Ebbinghaus played an important role in that process: Strauss would mention many years later that Ebbinghaus had made a great impression on him as a young man with his lectures on Thomas Hobbes;³² it was Hobbes who became the *indirect* means by which Strauss left Germany the year before the Nazis took power. The prominent Nazi intellectual Carl Schmitt was the *direct* means. How this happened makes an interesting story.

In 1932, Strauss wrote a review of Carl Schmitt’s bellicose *The Concept of the Political* (1927).³³ Strauss criticized Schmitt—who made the primordial distinction between friend and enemy the basis for a veiled attack on the Weimar Republic³⁴ and its adherence to the Versailles *Diktat*³⁵—for

³¹ “In Anknüpfung an die klassische Darstellung der natürlichen Schwierigkeiten des Philosophierens, an das Platonische Höhlengleichnis, darf man sagen: wir befinden uns heute in einer zweiten, viel tieferen Höhle als die glücklichen Unwissenden [cf. Tugendhat’s post-Nazi audience!], mit denen es Sokrates zu tun hatte; wir bedürfen die Historie zuallererst deshalb, um in die Höhle hinauf zu gelangen, aus der uns Sokrates ans Licht führen kann [this is the only time he even hints that this is possible or desirable], wir bedürfen einer Propädeutik, deren die Griechen nicht bedurften, eben des lesenden Lernens” (LSGS II, p. 439).

³² ‘A Giving of Accounts’ in Leo Strauss (Kenneth Hart Green, ed.), *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Lectures in Modern Jewish Thought*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1997 (hereafter ‘JPCM’), p. 461.

³³ ‘Anmerkung zu Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*’ appeared in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 67, no. 6 (August September), pp. 732-49. It is included (translated by J. Harvey Lomax) in Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (translated by George Schwab), University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996 (hereafter ‘Schmitt’).

³⁴ “For as long as a people exists in the political sphere, this people must, even if only in the most extreme case—and whether this point has been reached has to be decided by it—determine by itself the distinction of friend and enemy. Therein resides the essence of its political existence.

his failure to realize that Hobbes, despite his apparent authoritarianism and his head-headed political realism, was in fact *the father of Liberalism*.³⁶ Hobbes' Liberalism rested on the fact that 'the fear of violent death' that had driven men into Civil Society meant *that the Hobbesian State could not compel its members to die for it*.³⁷ Strauss called for thinking our way *through* Hobbes to gain what he called "an horizon beyond liberalism."³⁸ It will be noticed that Leo Strauss had found a way to apply Heidegger's *Destruktion* of the ontological Tradition to politics: Liberalism was now the enemy, not the *vulgär Zeitbegriff*. Schmitt was duly impressed to find himself criticized *from the Right* by a brilliant young Jewish scholar: not only had Strauss "x-rayed" his own anti-Liberal intentions³⁹ but had taken his

When it no longer possesses the capacity or the will to make this distinction, it ceases [by which he really means of the Weimar Republic that it 'has ceased'] to exist politically. If it permits this decision to be made by another, then it is no longer a politically free people and is absorbed into another political system" (Schmitt, p. 49).

³⁵ Schmitt, p. 73.

³⁶ "Hobbes, to a much higher degree than Bacon, for example, is the author of the ideal of civilization. By this very fact he is the founder of liberalism" (LS in Schmitt p. 91).

³⁷ "The right to the securing of life pure and simple—and this sums up Hobbes's natural right—has fully the character of an unalienable human right, that is, of an individual's claim that takes precedence over the state and determines its purpose and limits; Hobbes's foundation for the natural-right claim to the securing of life pure and simple sets the path to the whole system of human rights in the sense of liberalism, if his foundation does not actually make such a course necessary" (LS in Schmitt, pp. 91-92).

³⁸ "The critique introduced by Schmitt against liberalism can therefore be completed only if one succeeds in gaining an horizon beyond liberalism. In such a horizon Hobbes completed the foundation of liberalism. A radical critique of liberalism is thus possible only on the basis of an adequate understanding of Hobbes. To show what can be learned from Schmitt in order to achieve that urgent task was therefore the principal intention of our notes" (LS in Schmitt, p. 107; these are the last words of LS's Review).

³⁹ "Whereas Hobbes in an unliberal world accomplishes the founding of liberalism, Schmitt in a liberal world undertakes the critique of liberalism" (LS in Schmitt, pp. 92-3). Schmitt spoke about Strauss's 'Remarks' to his assistant many years later: "You've got to read that. He

argument one step further. But there remained a further step that Strauss, as a Jew, could not take: on May 1st, 1933, the same day as Martin Heidegger—and in pre-concert with him—Carl Schmitt joined the National Socialist Party.⁴⁰ But thanks to a letter of recommendation from Schmitt, Leo Strauss was already living in Paris, researching Thomas Hobbes under a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation.⁴¹ A letter Strauss wrote on May 19, 1933 to Karl Löwith,⁴² who was also of Jewish ancestry, is even more damning:

“And, as to the substance of the matter, i.e. that Germany having turned to the right does not tolerate us, that proves absolutely nothing against right-wing principles. On the contrary: only on the basis of right-wing principles—on the basis of fascistic, authoritarian, *imperial* principles—is it possible with integrity, without the ridiculous and pitiful appeal to the *droits imprescriptibles de l’homme*, to protest against the repulsive monster [*das meskine Unwesen*].⁴³ I am reading Caesar’s *Commentaries* with deeper understanding, and I think about Virgil: *Tu regere imperio...parcere subjectis*

saw through me and X-rayed me as nobody else has.” Heinrich Meier, *Carl Schmitt & Leo Strauss: The Hidden Dialogue*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1995 (hereafter ‘Meier’), p. xvii.

⁴⁰ See Safranski, p. 241. Victor Farías, *Heidegger and Nazism*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1989 notes that “it was Heidegger who invited Carl Schmitt to join the National Socialist movement, in a letter dated April 22, 1933, located in Schmitt’s personal archives” (p. 138). He cites Joseph W. Bendersky, *Carl Schmitt: Theorist for the Reich*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1983, p. 203 for this information. Bendersky in turn informs us that he found this letter among Schmitt’s Personal Papers (see n. 26).

⁴¹ See Meier, which includes the letter of thanks LS wrote to Schmitt.

⁴² The letter is found in Leo Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by Heinrich Meier, with the editorial assistance of Wiebke Meier, Volume 3: *Hobbes’ Politische Wissenschaft und zugehörige Schriften; Briefe*, J. B. Metzlar, Stuttgart and Weimar, 2001, pp. 624-25. Translation mine.

⁴³ ‘*Meskin*’ is a French word, here Germanized, that qualifies the *Unwesen* that one can only rebel against on the basis of the principles of the right. In other words, it refers to what LS opposes, namely liberalism. Which kind? The ‘*meskin*’ kind, meaning the ‘miserly’ kind. My thanks to Michael Zank for this note, and for his help throughout.

et debellare superbos.⁴⁴ There exists no reason to crawl to the cross [zu Kreuze zu Kriechen],⁴⁵ to liberalism's cross of as well, as long as somewhere in the world there yet glimmers a spark of the *Roman* idea." Also *Sprach Leo Strauss*. Nor did his political orientation change thereafter.

Having published a book on Hobbes in England in 1936,⁴⁶ Leo Strauss arrived in New York City in 1938. His first publication in the United States was an article about Xenophon. It undertook to prove that although Xenophon appears to be praising Sparta—his home in exile—he is in fact undermining its foundations.⁴⁷ In the Ancients, Strauss found a safe way to carry on his anti-Liberal project and help lead others out of that Second Cave. In 1948, his first American book—it was also about Xenophon and called *On Tyranny*—was published and furnished the occasion for Strauss to cooperate with his old friend from Paris, Alexandre Kojève, who wrote a pre-orchestrated response to which

⁴⁴ Truncated quotation from *Aeneid* VI.851-52. When the missing words ('*populos, Romane, memento. hae tibi erunt artes, pacique imponere morem*') the quotation reads: 'May you remember, Roman, to rule the peoples with an empire. These will be your arts: to impose the custom of peace, to spare the subjected and war down the proud' (translation mine).

⁴⁵ '*Zu Kreuze kriechen*' means to humiliate oneself before someone or something. In his forthcoming *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile* (Brandeis, 2006), Eugene Sheppard describes the historical background of this phrase. It was used by Bismarck during the *Kulturkampf* to mean 'we will never go to Canossa;' i.e. the Empire will never subordinate itself to the Christian Church as had happened in A.D. 1077 during the Investiture Controversy. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Professor Sheppard who brought this letter to my attention.

⁴⁶ Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes; Its Basis and Genesis*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1952 (first published Great Britain in 1936), hereafter 'PPH.'

⁴⁷ Leo Strauss, "The Spirit of Sparta or the Taste of Xenophon," *Social Research* VI: 4, pp. 502-36. "Xenophon's treatise *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* appears to be devoted to praise of the Spartan constitution, or, which amounts to the same thing, the Spartan mode of life. A superficial reading gives the impression that his admiration of Sparta is unreserved" (p. 502).

Strauss, also by prior arrangement, then responded.⁴⁸ The first time Strauss mentions Kojève in print is in his 1936 *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes; Its Basis and Genesis*: “M. Alexandre Kojevnikoff and the writer intend to undertake a detailed investigation of the connexion between Hegel and Hobbes.”⁴⁹

For a liberal like myself who studies Hegel, Ernst Tugendhat’s *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbstbestimmung* is like a breath of fresh air. He pierces the heavy armor of Hegel’s deceptive vocabulary, reveals what he calls Hegel’s *Umkehrung der Freiheit*,⁵⁰ and leaves us with a chilling description of conscienceless authoritarianism. Especially at a time when Anglo-North American scholars like Alan Patten are celebrating Hegel for his “civic humanist conception of Freedom,”⁵¹ it is refreshing to hear Tugendhat tell it (as we used to say in the 1960’s) “like it is.”

Damit ist der nicht einmal mehr von Hegel zu überbietende Gipfel der Perversion erreicht, einer gewiß nicht mehr nur begrifflichen, sondern moralischen Perversion, so daß man Mühe hat, sie nur nach ihrer begrifflichen Seite zu betrachten.⁵²

Although Tugendhat does not stress the fact, there are clearly no grounds—as there are in Hobbes⁵³—for a Subject in Hegel’s State not to fight and unhesitatingly die for it. Even though they never followed through on their 1936 project, it was probably somewhere between the Master/Slave

⁴⁸ Leo Strauss (Victor Gourevitch and Michael s. Roth eds.), *On Tyranny* (Revised and Expanded Edition; Including the Strauss-Kojève Correspondence), University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2000 (hereafter ‘OT’).

⁴⁹ PPH, p. 58, n. 1.

⁵⁰ “Der Sinn dieser *Umkehrung der Freiheit* in das, was normalerweise für ihr Gegenteil gehalten wird, ist, wie aus dem Zusammenhang sowohl des § 484 wie vor allem des vorhin zitierten § 514 hervorgeht, der, daß das Individuum sich gerade darin frei fühlen soll, daß es die von der Macht des Bestehenden ausgehenden Pflichten erfüllt” (Tugendhat, p. 349; emphasis mine).

⁵¹ Alan Patten, *Hegel’s Idea of Freedom*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, for ‘civic humanist’ freedom, see pp. 38-40.

⁵² Tugendhat, pp. 349-50.

⁵³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part II, ch. 21.

dialectic in the *Phenomenology*⁵⁴ and Hegel's Kant-bashing hymn to War in the *Philosophy of Right*⁵⁵ that Strauss and 'Kojevnikoff' intended to resurrect the authoritarian Hegel in order to attack the liberal Hobbes. This more direct approach was no longer safe after the War. Instead, they found it advisable 'to take seriously' (a famous Straussianism) Xenophon's defense long-forgotten dialogue about tyranny instead. Strauss wrote his brilliant 'Persecution and the Art of Writing' in 1941.⁵⁶ Assumed by Liberals to be an account of how Liberals conceal their Liberalism from the Spanish Inquisition, it is also a blueprint for Fascists to conceal their authoritarianism from the Tyranny of Liberalism.⁵⁷ Leo Strauss can only be understood by those who realize that he writes as he reads.⁵⁸

It was in 1948 that Leo Strauss published his fifth and final version, although only the third to be published, of 'the Second Cave.' He added a new twist to the story of what he calls "the classic description of the natural obstacles to philosophy" in his 'How to Study Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*.'

People may become so frightened of the ascent to the light of the sun, and so desirous of making the ascent utterly impossible to any of their descendents, that they did a deep pit beneath the cave in which they were born, and withdraw into that pit.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ See Alexander Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit* (translated by James H. Nichols Jr. and Allen Bloom), Basic Books, New York, 1969.

⁵⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, translated by S.W. Dyde, Batoche Books, Kitchener, 2001. "The courage of the animal, or the robber, the bravery due to a sense of honour, the bravery of chivalry, are not yet the true forms of it. *True bravery in civilized peoples consists in a readiness to offer up oneself in the service of the state, so that the individual counts only as one amongst many.* Not personal fearlessness, but the taking of one's place in a universal cause, is the valuable feature of it" (*Zusatz* to §327; emphasis mine).

⁵⁶ PAW, pp. 22-37.

⁵⁷ Note the example at PAW, pp. 24-5. For Liberalism as tyranny, see LS's use of Macauley at OT, p. 22.

⁵⁸ WIPP, p. 230.

⁵⁹ PAW, p. 155.

In no previous version had Strauss presented the Second Cave as the conscious result of any group's insidious agency. Who are these evil conspirators who would cheat us out of our birthright of natural ignorance? As it happens, it makes a good deal of sense that Strauss was thinking about conspirators at the time.

What Ernst Tugendhat did do Hegel and Heidegger in *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbstbestimmung*, one of his students must now do to Leo Strauss, especially because the neo-conservatives Strauss trained are presently guiding the destiny of the world's most powerful nation-state. Having rediscovered exotericism—the art of reading (and therefore writing) between the lines—a scholar must be up to the task of *Sprachanalytische Interpretationen* if she is to find out and then reveal what Strauss is actually doing. Strauss himself realized how difficult it would be to expose him. It was also in 'How to Study Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*' that he threw down his challenge to posterity:

One must also consider "the customary mildness of the common people," a good naturedness which fairly soon shrinks from, or is shocked by, the inquisitorial brutality and recklessness that is required for extorting his serious views from an able writer who tries to conceal them from all but a few.⁶⁰

Before surrendering to my own inclinations towards 'inquisitorial brutality and recklessness,' let me offer a few preliminary observations. *Strauss never discusses exiting from the natural cave*⁶¹ *or returning to it*. In other words, he makes no effort to read Plato's *Republic* as a defense of unchanging Being, the Idea of the Good, or the Philosopher's duty to say and live '□□□□□□'—'I went down'—as Socrates did and died doing.⁶² Although he never tires of attacking

⁶⁰ PAW, p. 185. I have taken this quotation as the frontispiece for my unpublished manuscript *Leo Strauss and National Socialism*.

⁶¹ See n. 31 above.

⁶² In NIP, LS reveals the crucial importance of 'going back down into the Cave' (LS denies that the true philosopher will do this) for his 'political philosophy' as a whole. "If all men are potential philosophers [a view suggested by LS's reading of John Wild, whose book is reviewed in NIP] there can be no doubt as to the natural harmony between

‘historicism’—presumably because historicists don’t take the Ancients seriously—the ‘Second Cave,’ as the second published version of 1935 made clear, belies this view:

Darum und nur darum ist die »Historisierung« der Philosophie berechtigt und notwendig: nur die Geschichte der Philosophie ermöglicht den Aufstieg aus der zweiten, »unnatürlichen« Höhle, in die wir weniger durch die Tradition selbst als durch die Tradition der Polemik gegen die Tradition geraten sind, in jene erste, »natürlichen« Höhle, die Platons Gleichnis schildert, und aus der ans Licht zu gelangen der ursprüngliche Sinn des Philosophierens ist.⁶³

Leo Strauss invented the Second Cave in order to describe the depth of post-Revelation (and post-Platonic) ignorance: philosophers need to break themselves free of religious ‘prejudice’⁶⁴—liberate themselves from Jerusalem *and* Athens—before they can find their way ‘back’ into the Socratic cave of ‘natural ignorance.’ This doctrine reveals Strauss’s thoroughgoing *historicism* precisely in the context of Plato, i.e., the archetypal anti-historicist thinker. *Plato’s point is that all human beings—at all times and places—are imprisoned in the Cave of Becoming and the bodily form.* Plato’s teaching is that emancipation from the Cave *is* Philosophy and that a return to it is Justice: this is the acme of *Athens*. With no realm of Ideas to which the Philosopher can ascend,⁶⁵ emancipation from this Cave becomes is

philosophy and politics which is presupposed by the idea of popular enlightenment [LS rejects this harmony; see HPP, p. 926]. Regardless of his attitude towards popular enlightenment, *Plato would have believed in such a harmony if he had held, as Wild thinks he did, that it is of the essence of the philosopher, who as such has left the “cave” of political life, again to descend to it* (NIP, pp. 360-61; emphasis mine).

⁶³ LSGS II, p. 14.

⁶⁴ See Michael Zank, ‘Arousing Suspicion Against a Prejudice: Leo Strauss and the Study of Maimonides’ Guide of the Perplexed,’ in *Moses Maimonides (1138-1204): His*

Religious, Scientific, and Philosophical Wirkungsgeschichte in Different Cultural Contexts, ed. by Goerge K. Hasselhoff and Otfried Fraisse (*Ex Oriente Lux: Rezeptionen und Exegesen als Traditionskritik*, vol. 4) Ergon Verlag, Würzburg, 2004.

⁶⁵ For the Forms as mere ‘classes or kinds,’ see RCPR, p. 169.

replaced by Strauss with escape from the deeper, darker, second cave of religious *prejudice* and Platonic Idealism.

Of course, Strauss was not the first to appropriate Plato's Cave for an anti-Platonic purpose:⁶⁶ it was Nietzsche who did that with his sun-challenging avatar in the opening moment of *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. Liberated from the shadows of God, Revelation, and the Immortal Soul, the Straussians follow Zarathustra out of some ghastly inversion of Plato's Cave and then taunts the Sun (between the lines, of course) having now, as a 'philosopher,' achieved a horizon 'beyond Good and Evil.' But Nietzsche, at least, had fought with Plato as an *open* enemy; Strauss had learned to Nietzscheanize Plato through Callicles and Thrasymachus and therefore to present himself more safely as reviving the Ancients against the Moderns. He can also, following Heidegger, appropriate Plato's language for an anti-Platonic use.⁶⁷ Thus Strauss devoted his productive scholarly life in the United States to an historicist '*Geschichte der Philosophie*' in which those alone who undermined Liberalism were allowed their secretive but compelling voice. The fact that he was never identified as a Nazi-sympathizer bears eloquent witness to his own considerable skill as what he called 'a political philosopher.'

⁶⁶ I have not sufficiently explored the possibility that Heidegger directly influenced LS in this appropriation of Plato's Cave (or was it *vice versa*?). Heidegger was certainly lecturing on Plato during the winter semester (1931-32) and emphasizing the Cave (see Safranski, pp. 214-224); whether LS heard these lectures or heard of them is unknown. For their content, see Martin Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit. Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet* in Gesamtausgabe, Bd. 34, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main, 1988. "Nochmals sei eingeschärft: wir müssen uns von vornherein von jeder sentimentalischen Vorstellung dieser Idee des Guten freihalten, aber ebenso auch von allen Perspektiven, Auffassungen und Bestimmungen, wie sie die christliche Moral und deren säkularisierte Abarten (oder sonst irgendeine Ethik) darbieten, wo das Gute als Gegensatz zum Bösen und das Böse als das Sündige gefaßt wird" (p. 100). It would appear that Heidegger had escaped the Second Cave and that his exit from the 'natural' one was consistent with becoming a Nazi.

⁶⁷ "One can express Heidegger's notion of ontology most simply by using Platonic expressions in an un-Platonic sense" (WIPP, p. 247).

...the adjective “political” in the expression “political philosophy” designates not so much a subject matter as a manner of treatment; from this point of view, I say, “political philosophy” means primarily not the philosophic treatment of politics, but the political, or popular, treatment of philosophy, or the political introduction to philosophy—the attempt to lead qualified citizens, or rather their qualified sons, from the political life to the philosophic life.⁶⁸

In the Second Cave allegory, Leo Strauss offered the first clue as to how he would carry on Heidegger’s project of finding a horizon beyond the Tradition *politically*. Heidegger, according to Strauss, was not *political* enough about his political commitments. Nor did Strauss ever repudiate even this feature of Heidegger’s thought. Two years before his death, Strauss wrote in ‘Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy’ (1971):

One is inclined to say that Heidegger has learned the lesson of 1933 more thoroughly than any other man. Surely he leaves no place whatever for political philosophy.⁶⁹

Surely, we are entitled to ask what kind of man would be *inclined to say* this about a former Nazi who never repudiated the Holocaust?

It took many years, and the patient courage of Guido Schneeberger, to force philosophers to take Heidegger’s Nazism seriously as a philosophical issue and *his* Party membership, like Carl Schmitt’s, was never in doubt. How long will it take for Leo Strauss—a Jewish émigré commonly

⁶⁸ WIPP, pp. 93-4 (emphasis mine). As for leading their ‘qualified sons,’ apply what LS says about Machiavelli in *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (cf. *Discourses on Livy*) to himself: “Even if a man who begins to corrupt a republic could live long enough to finish his work, he would necessarily lack the required patience and thus be ruined. Machiavelli’s argument silently shifts from more or less dangerous conspiracies against the fatherland or the common good which, if successful, benefit the conspirators, to patient long-range corruption, which is neither dangerous to the corrupter nor productive of crude benefits to him. We prefer to say that, being a teacher of conspirators, he is not himself a conspirator” (TOM, p. 168).

⁶⁹ Leo Strauss, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1983, p. 34.

presented as having fled from Hitler⁷⁰—to be revealed as the secret adherent to National Socialism that he actually was? Ernst Tugendhat was breaking new ground when he wrote the following in 1979:

Diese Zitate [from a 1933 announcement by Heidegger published by Schneeberger] zeigen, daß Heideggers Nazismus keine zufällige Angelegenheit war, sondern daß ein direkter Weg von seiner Philosophie—von seinem entrationalisierten Wahrheitsbegriff der Selbstbestimmung—zum Nazismus führte.⁷¹

Ernst Tugendhat richly deserves our gratitude and respect—even our love—for having written about Hegel and Heidegger as he did in *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbstbestimmung*. This required courage as well as insight. But given the fact that even Nazis can use ‘Socratic Ignorance’ for their own purposes, it is not clear that this book’s stirring conclusion is altogether sufficient. Tugendhat is writing as if the Nazis had been completely defeated: in 1979, he needed only to show the Fascist consequences of Hegel’s and Heidegger’s *Wahrheitsbegriffe* in order to refute them. But what if there are other Fascists more difficult to detect and therefore all the more dangerous? And what if these same Fascists have already appropriated a caricature of ‘Socratic Ignorance’ for their own uses? We need to find in our old Tradition a few Absolute Truths that prove the militant Nihilism at the core of National Socialism to be absolutely false. Without doing that, there may come a time—and sooner than we think—when there will be no more questions at all.

⁷⁰ “Strauss, Leo, 1899–1973, American philosopher, b. Hesse, Germany. Strauss fled the Nazis and came to the United States, where he taught at the Univ. of Chicago (1949–68).” <http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/people/A0846926.html>

⁷¹ Tugendhat, p. 243.