Interview with Richard Cox[1]
November 2, 2013

Richard Cox: [in progress] —is that he is far from the completely "quote serious figure" that he emerges to be in some of the controversialist literature of recent times. That in other words, he appears to Miss Drury[2] as a kind of demonic fellow who is harboring evil thoughts about democracy and so on; and among other things, what she completely fails to understand is the human character of Mr. Strauss: his remarkable, truly remarkable learning: many languages; writing in all kinds of places about all kinds of things—religion, politics, philosophy, metaphysics or morality. For all of that, he had a side of him which came to light only when I became a student at Chicago, namely, a man who was quite prepared to laugh, and to laugh uproariously, in fact.

How he came about, given the travails he went through, is still a mystery to me, quite honestly. Fleeing Germany ahead of the Nazis, making his way to England, where he began to learn some things, I think, about America to which he was destined to come, but where he also must have felt hunkered down. No place for you to go; no job to speak of. In any case, he came to the States, and by the time I first met him, what, 62 years ago this fall (yes, I think that's right), he was well established in his position as professor of political philosophy at the University of Chicago department. I think that was the first time in his life that he had a secure income, a place where he could really do his work unimpeded, much to the credit of the University of Chicago. I know nothing of the negotiations whereby he was brought to Chicago, but it was just a huge blessing for that university and for the bunch of students that he turned out over the years until the time he retired, as a matter of fact, and on beyond.

And two examples: one on Wodehouse; one on somebody else. Wodehouse, P. G. Wodehouse, wrote about a hundred novels—comic novels about England, America, from a very particular point of view. I'll read a little bit of a blurb about this book called *Praise for P. G. Wodehouse*. Quote: "Wodehouse's idyllic world can never stale. He will continue to release future generations from captivity that may be more irksome than our own. He has made a world for us to live in and delight in." Unquote. That's Evelyn Waugh. Another one: "P. G. Wodehouse is the gold standard of English wit." Christopher Hitchens. And so on. So what I did was to follow that up on my own over time, collecting a number of novels of Wodehouse's and [it] contains, I think, four different pieces by Wodehouse. And as a way of enjoyment and learning, I came to be a great fan of Wodehouse, simply because Strauss liked him. It was that kind of thing where this very dignified, very learned man talked about very serious things—he likes Wodehouse. He

[1] In the course of this lengthy interview, Cox and Stephen Gregory took several breaks; as a result, the interview has five parts. The Strauss Center thanks Richard Cox, Jr. for reading through the transcript of the interview and providing help with details.
[2] Shadia Drury, professor of politics at the University of Calgary and author of two books on Strauss: *The Political Ideas of Leo Strauss* (1988) and *Leo Strauss and the American Right* (1999).

above all loved the relationships depicted in these novels by Jeeves and Bernie Wooster. You say you've not read Wodehouse?

Stephen Gregory: No, I have not read Wodehouse.

RC: It's a treat to come into. When the war broke out, Wodehouse was in France. He was quarantined, in effect, by the Nazis. He made the bad mistake of being taken to Berlin and doing some lectures, talks on the radio. He was a political naïf, real naïve. In any case, he set to work in his usual fashion, even though he was a captive of the Nazis, to write probably his masterpiece, called *Joy in The Morning*—the book which he wrote in Le Touquet in France as the war ground on before he could get back. And I want to read a little bit of the opening of the novel because it so illustrates what Strauss, I think, would have found wonderful. Bertie Wooster is talking. He's telling what happened. It's like the *Republic* of Plato. Socrates says: "I went down to the Piraeus yesterday" and so on. This is narrated in that fashion by Bertie Wooster. I discovered, by the way, some years ago in one of the novels that Wooster in fact claimed to be a graduate of one of the colleges at Oxford, so I sent an email to the master saying they should do a plaque in honor of Bertie Wooster. Clearly, they didn't have funds for such a frivolous purpose. Bertie Wooster is a young man about town, clearly very wealthy, able to do as he damn pleases, and he has a manservant named Jeeves. Jeeves is an intellect. One of the things I think that greatly pleased Strauss was seeing the English class system, so to speak, lampooned by having the young master be an idiot and the gentleman's gentleman named Jeeves be a master of intellect—[he] eats a lot of fish and so on. The opening of the book *Joy in The Morning* is remarkable, so I'll read a little bit of it.

> After the thing was over, when peril had ceased to loom and happy endings had been distributed in heaping handfuls, we were driving home with our hats on the side of our heads having shaken the dust of Steeple Bumply from our tires, I confessed to Jeeves that there had been moments during the recent proceedings, when Bertram Wooster, though no weakling, had come very near to despair.

Now Bertie narrates, speaks. Within, a . . . Jeeves. Jeeves speaks:

> Unquestionably the affairs had developed a certain menacing trend, sir.
> Bertie: I saw no ray of hope. It looked to me as if the Bluebird had thrown in the towel and fondly ceased to function. And yet here we are, all woompsy daisy. Makes one think about that.
> [Jeeves:] Yes, sir.

There's an expression on the tip of my tongue which seems to me to sum the whole thing up. Rather when I say an expression, I mean a saying, a wheeze, a gag—what I believe was called a saw. Something about joy doing something.

> Joy cometh in the morning, sir.
> That's about the baby. Not one of your things, is it?
> No, sir.
> Well, it's dashed good, I say. But I still think there could be no better way in putting it.

And so on. I took the trouble this morning, just on the spur of the moment, to analyze the beginning of this book. Strauss was fond of saying the beginning is important, and he said that not because he was Strauss but because he had learned that from other people like Aristotle and Plato. The beginning is important. The way the beginning of this book is organized—what I read is a collection of two narratives sandwiched in between the dialogue. Wodehouse is a master of dialogue. He made great success in developing dialogue for stage plays, musicals in New York and London. And what I did was outline it the way I was taught by Strauss to do, namely, two narrative speeches enclosing a series of little dialogic exchanges. And then he goes on with narration and more and more dialogue. One of the more fascinating things that I only hit on this morning, quite frankly, though I've read the book a couple of times before, is the following: embedded in the dialogue which I just read is a surprising allusion, namely, joy in the morning is in the book of Psalms in the Old Testament. Wodehouse was a master of quickly introducing little bits of this kind which go completely over your head unless you were thinking about what he was saying.

In the first chapter, which is the beginning of the book, there are three such allusions. The first one is the Psalms, the Old Testament. Here's the second, part of the dialogue that was recorded which took place before they went to the country.

Bertie Wooster gets up. His man Jeeves typically brings him tea in the morning or maybe a kipper or something. And so he says to Jeeves:

> Odds Bodikan, Jeeves. I'm in rare fiddle to say; talk about exulting in my youth. I feel up and doing the heart for any fate, as Tennyson says.
> Longfellow, sir.
> Or, if you prefer it, Longfellow. I'm in no mood to split hairs. [RC laughs] Well, what's the news?

And so on. Here's what must have terribly amused Strauss if he read this novel: he's being persuaded to go to the country, and Jeeves doesn't want to go because he wants to take his holiday at the seashore. And so because he respects Jeeves and values his work as a manservant, he realizes he may owe him something. And so he says:

> Would you like something as a replacement for not going to that place in the country?
> Well, sir any little gift you'd like.
> I mean it, said Bertie.
> It is extremely kind of you, sir.
> Not at all, Jeeves. The sky is the limit. State your desire.
> Well, sir, there's recently been published a new and authoritative, an annotated edition of the works of the philosopher Spinoza. Since you are so generous, I would appreciate that very much.
> He goes to the bookshop. He says to the clerk, good morning, good morning. I want a book. [RC laughs]
> A book sir, he said with ill-concealed astonishment.
> Spinoza. [RC laughs]

> Which set him rocking back on his heels. Did you say, Spinoza, sir?
> Spinoza was what I said. You seem to be feeling that if we talk the thing out long enough, as man to man, we might eventually hit upon a formula.
> You do not mean a spinning wheel?
> No.
> It would not be the poison pen? Or with gun and camera the little-known Borneo, he queried, trying the long shot.
> Spinoza, I repeated firmly. That was my story and I intended to stick to it.
> He sighed a bit like one who feels that the situation has gotten out of hand.
> I'll go and see if it's in stock, sir. But possibly this may be what you are requiring.

It's said to be very clever, and it's a book called the *Spindrift*, a novel by a woman,[3] which is anathema to the characters in the story. It turns out—though I've done it rather ramblingly and very quickly—that the opening chapter of the book is organized as well as the Platonic dialogue. I really believe that. The opening narrative/closing narrative encompassing sort of dialogic exchanges which could be something like Plato's *Republic* without any of the seriousness of purpose. That with, when you think about it, the Old Testament Book of Psalms, Longfellow's poetry, and finally, Spinoza's collected works.

The Spinoza's particularly telling because of the following. As you know, Strauss himself wrote about Spinoza and placed him very high on the list of books to be read. My first teaching job was at Harvard from 1955 to '57. Among my students was a very able student named Michael Bamberger from New York City. As I got to know Michael Bamberger, I came to realize that he was a child of émigrés. His father was Dr. Fritz Bamberger, who had been able in Nazi Germany beginning in 1934 to organize some sort of schooling for people forced out of the schools by the Nazis in Germany. In 1939, the danger was so great that he abruptly left for New York with his wife and two children, Michael being one of them. Dr. Fritz Bamberger was known to Strauss in Germany, it turns out. He was a part of the group of young German Jews who were very well educated but who were very great targets of destruction: Bamberger, Strauss, Jacob Klein[4]—the three of them. What Bamberger did in New York is to do some teaching, a little bit of writing, but he was the editor in a strange way of *Coronet* and *Esquire* magazines, sort of production executive. But his serious work was to amass the largest collection of books by and about Spinoza, a rare collection of books which he late in his life gave to Hebrew University and which evolved into a library in Jerusalem, where Strauss once went. So life is filled with strange crossings and paths. Here was a student of mine at Harvard whose father knew Strauss in Germany and fled Germany, as Strauss had to go to New York. And as a matter of fact, the father's interest in Spinoza is a serious one compared to that of Jeeves in the book called *Joy in The Morning*, but the comic quality of it, I think, would have appealed to Strauss. Whether he actually read *Joy in The Morning*, I have no idea. His references to Bertie Wooster and Jeeves were more general than that.

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[3] *Spindrift*, by E. Maxtone Graham (Margaret Ethel Kington Blair Oliphant) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Press, 1906).
[4] Jacob Klein: see "People Mentioned in the Interviews" [hereafter "People"].

And I presumed today, talking with you, to do a quick look at the opening chapter on the principle that Jeeves as a character is of interest to Strauss, at least because of its overlapping meanings within British society but also—one other part of that little prelude is a very different one, but also literary. Strauss came, I think, when he was in England to learn something of the works of a man named H. C. Bailey.[5] I've forgotten all the titles of the guy, but he was a British crime writer who had another name too. But one of the books that he wrote was called *Dead Man's Shoes*. The lead character in some of those novels by H. C. Bailey was one Joshua Clunk. Joshua Clunk: J. C., Joshua Clunk was a learned barrister in England. Made a great deal of money which he invested in a fine dwelling; and he had flocks of birds, and he had a harmonium or something and he played and sang hymns. [RC sings]: "His mansion shall be mine, shall be mine. His mansion shall be mine." It overlapped a kind of rudimentary Protestantism with a reality of making money which, again, would appeal to Mr. Strauss, I believe. So that's by way of a kind of discounting of people like Drury, who make Strauss out to be some kind of serious monster, when in fact he was a man of enormous talents, including the talent to make people laugh.

One final one, to close that part. When I did the seminar on Machiavelli's *Discoursi* in the last part of my work at Chicago, as was characteristic of his procedure, he assigned chunks of the book for people to give papers. Well, very early in the quarter, a young man who was older than a number of the students—he was probably in his 30s at the time, I'm not sure where he was from, maybe Italy, maybe central Europe. He was assigned early on to say something about Machiavelli's *Discoursi*. What he did was to read some of the letters of Machiavelli, and the first thing he did was to say: Here's a letter of Machiavelli. Here's a letter of Machiavelli's wife to him: "Dear Niccolo, I'm so happy when you are away." Well, when the student read that we almost had to take Strauss out of the room, he was so convulsed with laughter. The sense, in other words, of the wit of Machiavelli being transferred now to the province of his wife, and the notion of get out, get out, get out.

So those are little tidbits that I've reconstructed from now over 60 years ago and have been sources of delight on and off for a very long time.

Part 2

RC: [in progress] —in very wonderful, wonderful book recently, *Feeling Our Feelings*. It's a book on the passions.[6] Very learned, very interesting.

SG: We were talking about P. G. Wodehouse and how much you think Strauss enjoyed him, and how Strauss was a man of laughter.

RC: That's right, including the fact that he did a wonderful book on that Aristophanic . . . called *Aristophanes*, which is a wonderful, wonderful book of the many books.

[5] H. C. Bailey (1878-1961), a prolific writer of historic fiction and detective stories, many of which featured detective Reggie Fortune or lawyer Joshua Clunk.
[6] Eva Brann, *Feeling our Feelings: What Philosophers Think and People Know* (Paul Dry Books, 2008).

SG: I had great difficulty reading the books on Aristophanes. They're very difficult.

RC: The plays are very compact. I mean, what Wodehouse does in this little example is reasonably easy for a man of great intellect to do, but Aristophanic comedy is another story entirely. I never learned Greek well enough to read him fluently, but even reading him in good translation, he's a man of wonder, absolute wonder. And Strauss would sometimes talk about him. As a matter of fact, a couple of times when I taught the *Republic* I had students read the *Ecclesiazusae*, which is an incredibly funny play and serious about what the limits of law are: you can't command young men to have intercourse with old hags, even though the law says so.

SG: How did you first come to know Strauss?

RC: I grew up in a very poverty-stricken family in Northern Indiana near Chicago, and I was born in Hammond, which is right around the bend from Chicago. My father had married twice. I was in his number two family of five boys. He and my mother both had very little education, formal education. They got caught in the terribleness of the Great Depression. My father had no work for years on end; subsisted somehow by a janitor's job at a church, handouts. My mother baked coffee cakes and we sold them on the street. We at one time lived in East Chicago, Indiana, which is one of the chain of industrial cities along the lakeshore. And we lived in the downstairs flat of a two-flat building. In between our building and another building was a vacant lot filled with debris, and upstairs was a family where a teenage boy was shot to death from a kid playing with a gun. Downstairs was a moonshine parlor, Italian-run moonshine parlor. On weekend nights, the drunks would come reeling out of that place and vomit all over our doorstep. I'm not trying to portray anything very sentimental about it, except to say my way to study with Strauss was started from a pretty poor position, to say the least.

How did I get where I did? It's only 25 miles from Hammond, where I was born, to the University of Chicago. You could drive it in an hour. I made a different route. I was inducted in the Army in 1943, I served until 1946. I then went to Northwestern for my first bachelor's, my first degree, and I met Ken Thompson—

SG: Was that on the GI Plan?

RC: Yes, indeed it was. I was one of the beneficiaries. I only deserved it in the sense I put in my time. I did no fighting. No combat, nothing destructive of anything, except good food and clothing. Yes, I was in three years. I ended my career, as a matter of fact, by the way, playing the trumpet, which I learned to do in high school. I played in the post band at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. And then I was discharged.

When I went to Northwestern, one of the people I soon learned to admire and respect was Kenneth Thompson.[7] Kenneth Thompson is a mentor like you rarely see. He himself was a

[7] Kenneth Thompson (1921-2013), scholar of international relations. He taught at Northwestern and the University of Virginia, and served as vice president for international programs at the

midwesterner who served in the infantry in World War II, in intelligence, I think. He became a student of Hans Morgenthau, one of the two great German exiled scholars in the department at Chicago in that era. I became a student of Thompson's and in fact also a student of Morgenthau.[8]

So when I finished the M.A., while finishing the M.A., I, at the suggestion of Ken Thompson and Roman Kredis,[9] who was a Harvard graduate—they said, both of them: You need to go elsewhere for a Ph.D. Where will I go? I tried out for a junior fellowship at Harvard. Turned down. I then applied simultaneously to Yale, to Princeton, and Chicago. In the spring, returns came in: I got nothing from Chicago. I had the two best fellowships at Yale and at Princeton. What was I to do? Ken Thompson talked with me. He said, among other things: Morgenthau would give you some work in the Center he's got money for; and secondly, he will get you something. So my most important decision I'd ever made in my life, apart from getting married to a beautiful woman, I said to Yale and Princeton: Thank you very much; I went to Chicago. So that's, in a way, how it happened. From sheer poverty in a family which was beset by the terribleness of the Great Depression, parents who had very little education, all of those kinds of conditions. Here I arrived at Chicago. It was a new world. I must say that in thinking recently about that transition, Northwestern struck me then as it strikes me still today, to what I know about it, as sort of a bourgeois university. High quality but not very much in the atmosphere that I found immediately at Chicago: the quadrangles, the Committee on Social Thought, where you were,[10] and the department of political science, which had not just Strauss but Morgenthau, David Easton,[11] Charles Hardin,[12] [and] several other people. But what I knew of Strauss was almost nothing. I was so busy trying to get my M.A. done and to keep bread on the table that I didn't even bother to look up anything about Strauss.

SG: And your M.A. was on—

RC: Thucydides. I'm ashamed to admit that I did that, because when I learned at Chicago from Strauss, it was an entirely different landscape. But that's the way it is. I think that's emblematic though of what happened to so many of us. We were, as undergraduates, or maybe masters—we were given some the routine of political theory. Something like Sabine's *History of Political Theory*,[13] which is dry as dust—never touches the text except at very light, little excursions. So when I wandered into the first course with Mr. Strauss, I believe it was—I haven't looked up the record, but I think it was a course on *The Idea of History* by Collingwood,[14] the Englishman. It happened that that was, particularly when I think back on it, I think important for me personally.

Rockefeller Foundation. Co-editor with Hans Morgenthau of *Principles and Problems of International Politics* (1951).

[8] Hans Morgenthau: see "People."

[9] We are unable to provide details about this individual.

[10] Cox refers to the interviewer, Stephen Gregory, who was a student in the Committee.

[11] David Easton (1917-2014), professor of political science at the University of Chicago from 1947-97. He was known for his application of systems theory to the study of politics.

[12] Charles M. Hardin (1908-1997), constitutional scholar, left Chicago in 1960. He was professor of political science at University of California, Davis from 1965-76.

[13] George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (1937).

[14] R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (1946).

I was reared in a poverty-stricken family but with strong bonds formed by the dedication of my parents, and secondly by the fact that my mother descended of a large German immigrant family, one of nine children. She worked as a servant until she was married at about age 29, and my father and she had then the five children.

So the way that I came to the University of Chicago, really, was through a kind of ordering process. First, I learned to be very disciplined in the Army, which carried over into my studies, I think. Secondly, when I got out of Northwestern, I was prepared to do the Ph.D. at Chicago, above all because I trusted Morgenthau and Thompson. I can't say enough about Thompson to the good. He was not only generous to me with support of various kinds, but to other people who studied with Strauss. The last year I was in Chicago, I was not at Chicago; I was at Oxford. Ken Thompson had gone from the political science department to the Rockefeller Foundation, where he spent several years, and he provided me with access to money to go to England to work on the Locke papers both at Oxford and at the British Museum, which I did. And I incorporated a fair amount of the stuff I found in Oxford and in London in the book on *Locke on War and Peace*.[15]

I have to gather my thoughts. The staunch moral backing coming from my parents, maybe most particularly from my mother because of the stern Lutheranism, German Lutheranism. I was reared in the Missouri City Lutheran Church, which is very stringent, very stringent, very stringent. And the pastor of the church was a H. A. Neuhaufer, a man of German descent, and I think I never saw him laugh once. He preached a doctrine of sin and salvation. But also what he did was to teach me something which proved to be, when I think back on it, of value, and that is to learn to be disciplined in your thought. How did that happen? Because as part of a coming to maturity in the Lutheran Church, you had to do Martin Luther's small catechism. That meant you start with the First Commandment. What does this mean? And you give the answer. No diversity permitted. You had to give the answer, and which of course has its very great limitations, eventually. But it served me well in the sense of a kind of training of the mind. But more important is the fact that it came into conflict with what I was learning in university life, namely, relativism. Historicism, as Strauss came to call them.

The book, *The Idea of History*,[16] struck a real nerve in me, I think, a moral nerve because I was confounded by the fact that I was increasingly taught that there are no standards other than those which the society has developed. And that meant even that Nazi Germany in principle was exempt from any condemnation by the principle of letting sleeping dogs lie, and I felt personally distressed, I think, at times about that. Where was I to turn? So one of the first things that happened, really, was the course on Collingwood. I learned for the first time that there was a serious road to go, if you wanted to take it. What road was that? Reopen the old books. Simply put, reopen the oldest books: the Bible, Plato, Aristotle, Thucydides. And so the next seminar I took in my quest to find a better way to judge political life was a course on Plato's *Laws*. You, I'm sure, know Strauss's books on the argument and reaction, drama and action of the Platonic dialogue.[17] I remember the opening lines, something like: Tell me stranger, is a man or a god your founder, and so on. And on we went. It's a big book.

[15] Published by Oxford University Press in 1960.
[16] R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (1946).
[17] *The Argument and Action of Plato's Laws* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

I must say that given Strauss's own great learning, including classical Greek, he was able of course to read the Greek in a way in which none of us in the course, I remember, could do. But he was not in the least high-handed or pretentious about it. He simply took for granted that he had to teach what he could, namely, with the English text of it, the Jowett translation[18] of it in a two-volume work. What I learned for the first time, I think, in a rigorous way: the possibility of really confronting a text. Confronting it, taking it in. Taking nothing for granted about it except what the author says, or does, or suggests; and I use those three terms because they are all related to the whole problem of dialogic speech in which the dialogues are presented to us. Some dialogues acting, some dialogues narrated. The *Republic* is narrated and so on, in terms of classification. But it was that kind of opening out that happened. I think it's interesting that many of the general themes that eventually are talked about in Strauss's works were not very much ever, in my experience at that time—were not very much the theme of the courses themselves. That was external and above, I think you could say. For example, the book *Natural Right and History*, which is probably his most important single book, I think, probably; he never taught that I know of courses on all of those figures. I know he certainly did on Rousseau, Machiavelli, and so on. But what he was doing, I think in retrospect, is find his way through these great books and establish a bridgehead against modern relativism and historicism, which was a very, very great contribution and remains so.

The third seminar, which I recall most completely, is the one on Machiavelli's *Discoursi*. In the usual way, Strauss handed out assignments arbitrarily. I happened to light with one with a group of chapters in book 3 of the *Discoursi*. Like all graduate students getting nervous about what they're going to do and the old man sitting there waiting for you to speak, I toiled away. By that time, I knew French very well and so I could do some of the Italian without too much difficulty. But I worked and worked and worked. Finally, I said: I've got to write this thing, but I'm exhausted. So I went to sleep, got up first thing in the morning. I think the seminar was in the afternoon. I typed furiously and realized that all of the work that I had been doing for some weeks on and off finally coalesced. I finally saw what Strauss meant about a kind of a rhetorical dialectic where Machiavelli as the author cleverly insinuates himself into the argument by taking the argument as it proceeds: one point, the next point, the next point until the whole group of chapters assumes a very different property compared to what one does when reading it on the surface.

All of that was by way of a prelude to my work in Oxford where, among other things, I had to contend with the realization that Locke, an important figure in the founding of America, had to be understood in his entirety. I wasn't capable of studying all of him. For example, *The Reasonableness of Christianity* is a work unto itself of great importance. The *Essay on Human Understanding* I've made some headway with over time, but I never pretend to really come to grips with it. I confined my work mostly to the *Letters on Toleration* and especially to the *Two Treatises of Government*. What I found at Oxford was interesting, namely, that quite contrary to what the general opinion was about men like Locke, he was assiduous in partial concealment, and with very good reason. He was threatened in England by the royal authorities and took

[18] In his courses, Strauss used the Loeb Classical library edition of the *Laws*, translated by R. G. Bury.

refuge in Holland. And what I found in the wealth of the documents at Oxford and in London was, for example, evidence that he denied having read at all certain authors. I found positive evidence of withholding in his books long before any notice of them in the public print. And also, in various other ways it gave me a very great awareness of the fact of political persecution. For example, there's an old collection called *Howell's State Trials*; I think that's the name of it. And in that set of volumes, Locke came upon the record of a trial held in Edinburgh, Scotland. There's a kind of a wry irony in the name of the man being tried, as you'll see: Thomas Aikenhead. Thomas Aikenhead, a young man of about 18 or 20. He was prosecuted for blasphemy. Blasphemy meaning what? He had read Hobbes and was applying Hobbesian doctrine, and they convicted him and hung him by the neck until dead. This was part of Locke's resource when determining what kind of way to write. I'm absolutely sure of that. That fits of course with the whole rigamarole, I guess you can call it now, of the arguments about esoteric, exoteric, double meanings. People like Drury have in effect convicted him out of hand for teaching a subtle, underhanded doctrine of the elite who'll rule and do so by noble lies perpetrated on the citizenry. What these people utterly fail to do is to realize the absurdity of imputing to Strauss a notion of writing which had never before been broached in public print. There's something idiotic about that.

Refreshing my memory about it the other day, reading my French, I remember some years ago seeing this so I went and got it. This is from the great encyclopedia of Diderot and company:[19] *Exoterique*. The Double Doctrine, it's called. I'll just translate a little bit of it: "the ancient for Lazarus had a double doctrine. One external, public or *exoterique*; the other internal, secret or *esoterique*." And so on. The whole idea of a double doctrine—in other words, just to use one piece of evidence—pre-exists Strauss by two centuries. There's something absurd about people who claim that he invents such a way of proceeding.

And even in doing the book on Locke, I came across a lot of materials of course, some of which I could use. One of them was about a century after Locke published the *Two Treatise of Government*, an Englishman named Josiah Tucker wrote a book about these matters, about Locke and so on. And he came to the conclusion after some soul-searching that Locke was not to be trusted as to the validity of his seeming to follow the argument of Richard Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polities*. Here is, once again, completely separate evidence—once again, early on—of the difficulty of simply taking Locke for granted when he claims, for example, to be following Richard Hooker. And that's incorporated in the book *Locke on War and Peace*, which is still I think used a fair amount just in bibliographical records about the writing on Locke.

But it was a thrilling thing to work at Oxford, courtesy of Ken Thompson. And one further remark about Ken Thompson: because of his position at Rockefeller he had access to funds to help young people. One of the things he did for me was to let me have some money to run a small summer seminar of young people, and somewhat older people on the theme of ideology, which I'd done some work on in France when I was on the Fulbright. And for example, when my wife and I landed back in New York in the summer of 1955, Ken Thompson, then in New York, living in Scarsdale took me and my wife, and Ken and his wife, [and] we went to visit Joe

[19] Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1751-72).

Cropsey[20] and Lilian. Joe was still in New York teaching as an economist. So what Thompson did was to find funds at the Rockefeller to permit me to have a little group of the people that Thompson was interested in. And we would gather at Harvard and have talks together; we would invite in some outside people—one of them Hannah Arendt,[21] as a matter of fact. And we talked about ideology, and people worked on separate documents of their own which they thought were relevant. Among those who were in that group are the following: David Lowenthal,[22] Joseph Cropsey, Morton Frisch,[23] myself, somebody else maybe, all people who had at one point or another been involved in the teaching of Strauss. And Joe, as you know, left to become a political scientist, a political philosopher in Chicago.

SG: What year was this that you had the group on ideology?

RC: The summer of '56. I was only really at Harvard one summer. I went to Harvard having been offered jobs elsewhere. I knew when I went to Harvard that I would not be staying long there, because there is only a very, very select clientele that made it up to the tenured rank. But I did have that one summer. And once again, it was Ken Thompson who furthered it. But even further up in time, after I was working on the doctorate, he (Thompson) would have access to money to help various scholars, some of them Strauss students, some of them not.

So how did I come to meet Strauss that way? It took a long time to get from Hammond, Indiana to the Midway to the Social Science building to see this dumpy little man with the big spectacles, wisp of hair, tiny little voice, cigarette in the mouth. And I remember being fascinated: little pieces of paper about like this, and a little yellow pencil about this long, a stub pencil to make a note. Nobody could read it except him. But that's the way he taught.

We're talking about Plato's *Laws* now. We open the book. All we do is read. Then we talk. Then we talk. Then we read. Even so big a book as Plato's *Laws*, he would have of course to make strategic decisions about where we were going to look most carefully; but it was often sufficient, so you came away from it with the idea this a wonderful way of exploring what is law about, and you can return to it time again to think through what it means. One of the students one time asked him: Mr. Strauss, what do you do when you begin to study someone's work or some new writer of importance? He said, smiling: I clear off my desk. Which was wonderful: the metaphor of getting rid of my ideas about this book which I may have inherited from someplace and putting it to the test of reading. This was, I must say, and is now so evident and compelling. As I this morning read—and for the first time ever did a quick analysis of the opening chapter of *Joy in The Morning*, that's peanuts compared to the great works, Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*, Al Farabi on Plato, Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and so on.

[20] Joseph Cropsey: see "People."
[21] Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), political theorist and author of the influential *The Human Condition* (1958).
[22] David Lowenthal: see "People."
[23] Morton Frisch (1923-2006), professor of political science at Northern Illinois University 1964-92; author and editor of numerous works on American political thought.

I think the remarkable thing was that the Strauss courses, whether lecture courses or seminars, were simply a wonderful compound of serious and intelligent thinking and talking along with wonderful gales of laughter—comical things that happened—which is particularly true in Machiavelli. Harvey Mansfield once said, years ago: If you read a chapter of Machiavelli and don't laugh, you've missed something. Which I think is not a bad rule, a kind of hermeneutic rule: just take up the subject matter and treat it the way it needs to be treated. So that's a long way 'round to the answer, how did I get to know Strauss.

SG: Did someone recommend to you taking one of his courses, like Ken Thompson or someone else?

RC: Ken Thompson did. Yes, he was disappointed of course that I didn't get a grant from Chicago the first time 'round, but I think he reasoned—even though he didn't know Strauss a great deal at the time, he reasoned that I should, I could, and would profit from studying with that man as well as with Morgenthau, which happened, as it turns out. He himself, whether he ever read very much of Strauss, I don't know, quite frankly. We parted ways, not as friends but geographically and career-wise. And he went, as you know, to take up the post that Herb Storing had vacated in Virginia when Storing died from a sudden heart attack, Storing being one of Strauss's other students.

Part 3

RC: [in progress] —to teach was to do this kind of work, scholarly work which was not anything original in the strict sense, but was original in the sense of the organizing of the material to focus upon key issues, as you've seen in the table of contents of this book. And using the very finest materials, one can find from different points of view. Different points of view is what's critical, because the understanding of the state and international relations proves to be itself a very complicated topic—as we are seeing today, for example, as to whether Sharia law is going to be incorporated into the laws of the United States, with some very untold consequences, I suspect.

So that and the book of ideology, which is similar to this one in scope and method reflects the same principle: provide scholarly materials, or choose scholars' books to give them to students, graduate and undergraduate, who can be expected then to deal with the problems that result in the way in which these things occur in political life.

This morning for fun I googled Leo Strauss. Have you done that? What the recent numbers are?

SG: Well, I haven't looked recently.

RC: The number of hits:[24] 1,820,000. Stupefying. Most of them fragmentary, I'm sure. Passing references—algorithms, I guess they call it. Tracks him down. But a lot of them more serious, including the very great controversy that erupted early in this past period when the war in Iraq took place.

[24] That is, visits to the Leo Strauss Center website.

SG: The class on Collingwood: How did Strauss's course compare to your previous academic experience?

RC: It was new. It was new above all in the sense that it was clear Strauss found Collingwood's understanding defective. He could not simply contend that and tell it to the students. What he had to show is: We'll work our way through and we'll give him every chance to reply. Couldn't do that literally, of course, but give him every chance to reply in the sense of taking seriously that if he makes this point and elaborates it with this subargument, you have to look to that. And that was for me and for many of the other graduate students, I think, a revelation, quite literally. It was a way of reading that had come into great conflict with the traditional lecturing, teaching, textbook sort of thing, where in a textbook on political thought, you get summaries of what are said to be the main doctrines [but] what you don't see is the arguments. The arguments are what's key, and Strauss was by that time so immersed in that way of proceeding that it felt very natural to have him lead the way. But he was very responsive to questions. I think it was in that one where I smartly said to him one time: Mr. Strauss, you keep suggesting we need to go back and read some of these early books, why can't we just do it on our own? And he liked that, because it allowed him then to talk at some length about what, like an archaeological dig, we're looking down to find the roots and the roots are not easily found. The roots, that is to say, of modern thought; the roots indeed of classical thought. How did that come to be of this kind? And so always the question was: Where do we begin? We begin with the beginning and we go to the end. And we will use the best texts we can: the best editions, for example. And that was true throughout. I sat in on a couple of the courses, took three or four for credit. But you said earlier there were about 47 transcripts over the years he taught.

SG: There are more courses than there are transcripts.

RC: More courses than transcripts. So I got I guess you'd say a kind of appetizer. That's really what it was: an appetizer which proved to be beneficial all the way down the road, because, as I said earlier, my discovery of the book called *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of The War*[25] came about only because I learned enough by that to make inquiries.

As a matter of fact, I remembered the other day Strauss was very, very responsive to students in so many ways. He loved their questions and he would dig back at them. And often we would go after the seminar or meeting to the Social Science tea room and students would sit around, and he would have tea and cookies and carry on the discussion from the course or from other kind of matter. But he was wonderfully accessible in my experience of him. Now admittedly, I was among the first Chicago wave, so to speak, behind him. Behind me were—ahead of me, I'd guess you'd say—were the New School wave: David Lowenthal, Joe Cropsey, Harry Jaffa,[26]

[25] A collection of poetry by Herman Melville, published in 1866. See *Melville, Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War: Civil War Poems*, with introduction by Richard H. Cox and Paul M. Dowling (Prometheus Books, 2001), and Cox and Dowling, "Herman Melville's Civil War Poetry: Lincolnian Prudence in Poetry," *Political Science Reviewer* 29 (2000): 192-295.
[26] Harry Jaffa: see "People."

maybe Howard White, and so on. But I was the first of the group to go through to the Ph.D. in his Chicago career. He came, I think, in '49 and I encountered him first in—

SG: 1951.

RC: In 1951. And then I went to England in the fall of '54, finished the dissertation in the spring of '55. Then I took five years to completely rewrite the material in the form of the book. In the meantime I was doing my own teaching and so on. But the thing about his openness: he welcomed students to bring in suggestions about things they'd read. He was, by the way, also at times comical. Jeremy Rabkin,[27] [a] guy I've known for a long time, taught at Cornell; he's now at George Mason in the law school. Rabkin taught at Cornell for a long time. Strauss came to Cornell to give a talk, and one of the faculty members was assigned to go and bring Strauss to the lecture room. They went to his room in the motel and he said: I can't come now, I'm watching Gunsmoke.[28] This was not just an idle thing. He loved those programs: white hats, black hats. He loved the morale, the morale and the morality of the confrontation between good and bad, and acted out.

And so one time somewhere along the way he said: Mr. X—someone I don't know—he said, Mr. X told me of a recent book; it's called *Melville's Quarrel With God*. That's an interesting title. What is that book? It kind of got stuck in my memory. After I started work on the *Battle-Pieces*—no, a little bit before that—I had a graduate student who wanted to do work on *Benito Cereno*, Melville's novelette. And keeping in mind what I'd learned from Strauss and what I was now going to learn from reading, I hoped, *Melville's Quarrel With God*,[29] I realized that I might be on to something interesting. This book was published coincidental with the publication celebrating the hundreth anniversary of Moby Dick (1851-1951). And Lawrence Thompson was a professor at Yale in English. What he does is to look carefully at Melville's works, especially *Moby Dick*. And here's a statement: "One of Milton's most brilliant opponents in *Spirit of That Letter* was one of Melville's favorite authors, the seventeenth-century Frenchman backslider from Calvinism named Pierre Bayle. After having sought refuge in Rotterdam from Catholic persecution, Bayle soon discovered that his fondness for ridiculing all theological pretentiousness was likely to put him in equal trouble with the Dutch Calvinists. A great admirer of Montaigne, Bayle developed his own varieties of self-protecting, stylistic equivocations and employed them with devastating effect to his anti-theological *Dictionnaire historique et critique* published in Rotterdam in 1697." Because Melville owned a set of Bayle's *Historical and Critical Dictionary* and made extreme use, and so on. It's very clear that if Strauss hadn't read the book, he would have approved of the stance, so to speak, taken there of Melville's acquisition of a considerable library. But certain books like the Pierre Bayle and the Montaigne were clearly exciting to him.

[27] Jeremy A. Rabkin, Professor of Law at the Antonin Scalia Law School at George Mason University School of Law.
[28] A Western television drama that aired on American television from 1955-61.
[29] Lawrence Thompson, *Melville's Quarrel With God* (1952).

The double doctrine, in other words, came to light in still a different form. And when a graduate student at my suggestion took on *Benito Cereno*,[30] I felt of course the need to give it a whirl myself. I'd read it quickly through before. What happened was startling, but in a way shouldn't have been, given what I'd already learned about rhetorical techniques. *Benito Cereno*. Have you read it? It's a story of slave revolt on a Spanish ship in the southwestern Pacific. The story is so organized that it begins with a mood piece of grayness. It turns out that the Spanish slave ship has been encountered by a ship from the States.

SG: It's the Rights of Man, the U.S. ship?

RC: I've forgotten the title of the ship. But in any case, the main thing is the confrontation between an American ship and a Spanish ship, where onboard the Spanish ship there's been a slave revolt. And so when the skipper from the American ship confronts the ship, he is greeted with a strange spectacle. Everything looks to be in order but the slave revolt is unobtrusive, to say the least. Everything seems to be in order. What I really realized after quite some time is: I don't know what to make of some features of the story. What am I supposed to look for? Finally, I hit on the idea: the dates. I looked. I made a diagram; I made a diagram which listed all of the references to or actual presentations of dates and times. How do you suppose it centers?

SG: I have no idea.

RC: The Fourth of July. The Declaration of Independence. I was the first to discover that. I know that from the print, from the documentaries. But it was a thrilling thing to see, because it was done so innocently, so to speak. The dates appear to be part of the drift of the statement, of the story. It's only when you take the time to dissect for that purpose, at least, what the dates are. You know that book was published in 1856 in America, four years before the Civil War broke out. My reasoning about the book is that Melville sought to reach *some* people, people who thought more carefully about the problem of slavery and what to do about it. And he needed to do it in a way that was able to take account of the what, the moral pretentiousness of the American skipper, his naiveté and so on. But when you look at the book carefully and then see how he's so carefully organized it to cause a kind of sudden awareness: this coincides with the day of independence when that document comes to be enacted. "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, and among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Melville was a profound student of America, that I'm convinced of. I'm quite convinced of it. And Paul Dowling and I have done some work on *Moby Dick* given that premise. I've written some on Moby Dick in the introduction material, I think, to the book on the Civil War. But I've still haven't made much headway with the front material of *Moby Dick*, which is completely ignored in the literature. Completely ignored. It's amazing that all of that front material which consists of an etymology and extracts—very long, quite a few pages—has completely escaped the detection of literary scholars.

[30] Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno* (1855).

Strauss was not responsible for my finding my way to that directly, of course, but because of the taking-in of his teaching as to what to do with important books. How do you know it's an important book? Well, there are some surface indications it's a very learned book. Maybe it's superficially learned, but we'll see. His effect on Shakespeare studies is another—

SG: This is something that I wanted to ask you about.

RC: Yes. I've trod upon forbidden soil by publishing one essay on Shakespeare.

SG: Well, Strauss taught a wide range of works, including Aristophanes' plays. He did teach literature.

RC: He taught that one time.

SG: But on the whole, certainly he didn't focus on teaching literature.

RC: No. That's right.

SG: And yet his students—I mean, you have this lively interest in Melville, in Wodehouse, Shakespeare, other students of his who published on Shakespeare and on other literary figures, and the question is: What is the connection between Strauss's teaching political philosophy and his students becoming students of literature in many cases? I mean, they're not teaching in literature departments but they are writing very interesting and sometimes provocative, even profound essays on literature. How did that happen?

RC: I think it happened by—what suddenly occurs to me is the metaphor of osmosis. That is, a movement through the filaments so to speak, and where the underlying premise, truly accepted, or worked at to be accepted, is that men of great mind do not write simply. They write, in effect, to teach: teach maybe moral lessons; or lessons about the depravity of man, to take a more ugly side of it. They teach by investing their characters with moral qualities: bad and good, pride, humility, anger, hatred. Gentler forms of that, more savage forms.

One of my graduate students did a dissertation on *Richard III*: "Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by this son of York." It's a poem; it's a poem about the corruption of soul which takes place. Lincoln, as you probably know, thought that *Macbeth* is the greatest of Shakespeare's plays, and with good reason. He gives reasons why. That's a great, great treatment of tyranny. So the empathy between looking at philosophic texts and looking at great literary texts—I don't mean the kind of paperbacks you buy in the airport, which are disgustingly trivial but may keep you from falling completely asleep in your travel—but the greatness of their books is proved in the process of the eating, so to speak, to use another metaphor. You take them in and work on them. Now my friend Paul Dowling trained as a professor of literature, English, did a wonderful little book called—what's the name of it—it's Milton's *Areopagitica.*[31] It's clearly influenced by Straussian techniques, if you want to use that

[31] *Polite Wisdom: Heathen Rhetoric in Milton's* Areopagitica (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995).

word, of looking carefully at arguments as they develop and as they redevelop and so on. I got into that mood some years ago. I can't tell exactly why now, but I got into it because, once again, it's this question of the overlap between politics and human life more generally.

I began to wonderfully, wonderfully question about what a Shakespearean comedy is. So I took up the question of *Midsummer Night's Dream*. A frivolous little thing. Samuel Pepys in his diary says he went to a performance of *Midsummer Night's Dream*; he never saw such trash in his life. Well, that's a serious man, you know. Is that true? Is it a trivial piece? So I spent some time particularly writing an essay on it up in my house in Maine one summer and I got it published. I found the play to be a marvel of wonderful things. It's political philosophy in the garb of literature. Not all of the political philosophy books, in other words, are so identified, by any means. And another variety of that interest, not just the Shakespeare—by the way, Jaffa was one of the leaders of that whole thing, in the case of *Lear*, the tragedy of King Lear, and others followed in the way. Tom West has done that, John Alvis has done that,[32] a lot of people have done it. It simply occurred to me that one has to make allowances for the form so that the thought is embedded in different ways in the different works.

One of the books that many students of Strauss have come to regard very highly is *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen's supreme novel. I've read that book at least five times over the years. Every time I read it, I see something more in the way of moral seriousness in comic character. Her remarkable ability to portray Mr. Collins, the obsequious, fawning preacher of the Church of England—done, I think, without malice but with serious moral purpose to show how, in the jargon of these times, how the class system in the particular form as it's encountered in the novel is corrupting. The obsequious Collingwood[33] fawns over the good lady nearby who is part of the decaying aristocracy of England. And those things had to interest Strauss. Whether he ever read *Pride and Prejudice*, I have no idea, but students of his (including this one) have read it with great care. In fact, one of the finest essays—

SG: He does have a famous remark comparing Austen to Dostoevsky, which suggests he must have read Austen.

RC: Yes.

SG: If he read Austen, you assume he read *Pride and Prejudice*.

RC: You think so?

SG: Yeah.

RC: One of the finest essays on *Pride and Prejudice* is done by one of the smartest guys I've met, named Adam Schulman. Adam Schulman teaches at St. John's. He's a theoretical physicist. History of science.

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[32] John E. Alvis and Thomas G. West, ed., *Shakespeare as Political Thinker* (Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2000).
[33] Cox says "Collingwood" but clearly means "Collins."

He's one of the smartest men I've ever met. This range of his is so extraordinary. The essay on *Pride and Prejudice* (I have a copy of it somewhere)—it's wonderful because it sees the ways that the delicate techniques of Austen's ability to provide character studies, so to speak is, well, it's a revelation. What happens in the book is that the prideful man and the somewhat prideful woman find their way to each other by reforming themselves morally. It's not a trait in political philosophy, but it's a wonderful evocation of the ways in which erotic desire, family pride, religious appearances, all become entangled. And the people are finding their way in that maze. So I only speak for myself, then.

I have a long essay on the *Tempest*, which I've never been satisfied with. I probably will never publish it. But I did publish the one on the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. And among other things, I start the way I think Strauss would want one to start, namely: Is there any other play in the Shakespeare corpus about the founding of a political society? And the answer is no. This is the play. It's about Athens. Is that accidental? That seems improbable. And so on. So that's how I came to do it. And David Lowenthal[34] some time back said it's the finest thing he's seen and most beautifully written. But he's done a lot of work on Shakespeare himself, published a lot of stuff on Shakespeare as well as on Lincoln.

SG: You began in thinking about, in responding to my question by using the metaphor of osmosis, that there was—and I assume that the osmosis refers to habits of mind developed in studying political philosophy, then being applied to the reading of literature.

RC: I think that's right. Absolutely. It takes some time for that to happen, of course, because in my experience, you first have to feel you're on solid ground in making these transfers, so to speak. But they work. For example, one of the features of certain kinds of writing, according to Mr. Strauss and others who've worked with texts taught by him, who've been taught by him, is that certain works are organized such that there is a central part which is in effect perhaps the key to the whole. The beginning and the center, in other words, and the end—the alpha and omega, to use biblical terms—are what's so critical. What I discovered in organizing the essay on *Midsummer Night's Dream* was that, not surprisingly, the very center of the play takes place outside the city walls, which is to say, in Rousseauean terms, in the state of nature. In a way, it's very simple when you look at the structure of the play. Where is this center, and why is it there in the way in which it is?

SG: Did Strauss in any way encourage his students to study literature, or read literature seriously, or even write on literature?

RC: I can only speak for the time that I either was a student of his in Chicago or later, in a secondary kind of way—I might have heard from him or sent something to him by a note. But I don't recall that he explicitly sought that. But I was following, I guess by that time I was following the example of Jaffa. Jaffa has been important to me for two reasons. One is the book on constitutionalism, *The Four Pillars of Constitutionalism*—he was the one who suggested that

[34] David Lowenthal: see "People."

I do that. But also his early essays in the *Political Science Review* on *King Lear* was a kind of a beacon of what one could do and should do. Harry is a very learned man, and in this case he put his way of proceeding, which he'd learned from Strauss in part but also just from his own native intelligence, I think, working on literary works, and he did it with a fare thee well. It was highly criticized, I think, by people in "quote literary studies," but one of the things to reply to that is: a lot of people in literary studies don't know what the hell they're doing. They get all kinds of doctrines. Today—incredible theorizing, critical theory. A friend of mine from SUNY Buffalo English department said to me awhile back, shaking his head sadly: the department is searching for a queer theorist. I said: What is that about? Oh, we've got to have all these theories modeled in our department, so we have to have a Marxist, we have to have a queer theorist—and that means the dredging, the degeneration of literary studies, namely, old-fashioned pick-up-the-book and read. He was appalled. He, by the way, is a very liberal political person, but he could see the degeneration before his eyes.

So that people like my colleague Dowling, trained in literature at Indiana, he came to me just to teach at my seminars when he first came to teach at Canisius College. Then we developed a great friendship. He is truly one of my most profound friends. A Roman Catholic, student of literature. Good . . . writer. He's made his way in literature in large part by reflecting on the learning that he got from reading Strauss's works. I don't think he ever met Strauss. But partly through me telling him things he might do, he became quite, what, skilled at it. He is still working, for example, on a long essay on *King Henry VIII*, a play which has been mostly ignored by literary people, which he thinks is greatly undervalued. I don't know that he is doing a convincing argument, but I've seen some of it. So yes; great books fall into categories by modern classification systems, I guess, but they defy those boundaries.

There's a man named Leon Craig. He is in some circles known as the prairie Straussian, way out west in Canada. He's written a huge book published in the past few years.[35] It's on Platonism, namely, it's a book mostly on Hobbes's *Leviathan* but it has some interesting chapters on Melville's *Moby Dick*. And those chapters coincide with some of the things I've discovered independently, namely, that the shameful inadequacy of literary scholars in the Melville field shows up in their utter silence about a big chunk of the book. These introductory things look sort of strange and difficult and puzzling, and so we just pass over that. Everybody knows that the book begins "Call me Ishmael." That's the way the book begins—well, not quite. It begins with the title. The book has two titles: Moby Dick, semi-colon, comma; or comma, the Whale. Well, that's strange, the book with two titles, seemingly very different titles, and yet the same book. How is that possible? Or take another aspect of it: the extracts are voluminous in nature: many, many pages of them. Many pages, many pages. By the time you finish reading them, you're bored and exhausted. What the hell is this: a letter from somewhere in 1622 side-by-side with an extract from Montaigne, side-by-side with a whaleman's song. Mish-mosh. Mish-mosh. But it turns out—and I discovered this only by teaching a little bit of *Moby Dick* at a seminar in Dallas some years ago, where the focus on was on teaching teachers who teach (that is, grade school and high school), and all the students were expected to read *Moby Dick*, which is a big, big, big book. But some of them tackled it. And I had a little seminar group of my own which met periodically. And this is against the background of some very interesting learned lectures by the

[35] *The Platonian Leviathan* (University of Toronto Press, 2010).

faculty on that program about *Moby Dick*. I could see that some of the students were impatient with that, and so I did the—what now comes natural, I said: Let's open the book. You see the double title. We wonder about it. We look and see the dedication to Hawthorne. Now that's interesting. The *genius* of Hawthorne, not just anything. And then we have etymology about the whale; and then we have those damned extracts which are so boring, so boring, so boring. I said to the students: Let's read them, the extracts. It turns out they are five biblical extracts from the Old Testament. Extracts. And they focus on Jonah, which is to say is a harbinger of the wonderful chapter nine, the sermon on Jonah, and so on. I haven't made as much headway as I would like because the book is bafflingly difficult. Craig rightfully says it's a philosophical work in the disguise of literature, and I think that's true. But the way in which I came at it was simply to sort of get into the same habit, the way I did this morning in reading the opening of *Joy in The Morning*—which, it turns out, is a passage in Psalms. Who would have thought? It's comic stuff. Bertie Wooster is a nitwit, but he has the money to hire this incredible Jeeves, who once for a present received the annotated set of all of Spinoza's works. Yes, we laugh.

SG: Was there something literary about Strauss's teaching of political philosophy? Was his approach literary in some ways?

RC: Mostly the Machiavelli. I think he was intrigued and tantalized initially by the, well, the sheer comedy of it and the overt brutality which seems unfitting to a man of philosophic ability. Don't ask for a man to borrow his pistol, but ask him to borrow it and then shoot him. Lessons like that. And when he opens his book on Machiavelli, he speaks about he's a teacher of evil. Morality and so on. That book, by the way, is enough to digest for a lifetime.

Mansfield, one hell of a Machiavelli scholar himself, said one time: I make a kind of trek with hard work and to some part of, say, the *Discoursi*, then I discovered that Strauss was there first. That's the way it is. Yes, the literary quality of Machiavelli is wonderful. I taught, as a matter of fact, with some care the *Little Comedy*, which is about fornication, adultery, and so on; all of those evil things. But Strauss reveled in those works for the solidest of reasons: that is, they were explorations of the human problem, so to speak; all of the passions that are embedded in us. This big book of Eva Brann somewhere, letting our *Feeling Our Feelings*.

So yes, I think in response to your question, the case which was most appealing to me was his treatment of the Machiavellian comedy, so to speak. And he laughed a lot. We laughed a great deal in that seminar on Machiavelli. Laughed and laughed. Once again, I come back to the point of earlier on: some of the really harsh critics of Mr. Strauss haven't a clue what he was like as a teacher. Not a clue. They can't have a clue because they couldn't say the things they do.

SG: You mentioned the first three courses you took from him: Collingwood, and Machiavelli and—

RC: Plato's *Laws*.

SG: And Plato's *Laws*. Were there other courses that you took from him?

RC: I started a course on Rousseau, as I recall, and maybe one other, which would bring the total to about five. That wouldn't be surprising that it was that few, because I had to do all the other courses in my field: constitutional law, public administration, international politics. Yes, so that sounds about right. I would have taken more but I was already eager to get my degree and get a job. Keeping bread on the table.

SG: Yeah.

RC: You spoke of the GI Bill, by the way, earlier, and I'm greatly indebted to that law because it helped people like myself, frankly, get out—get out of from desperate situations and make our way. And his generosity of temperament towards me and others like me, of which there were a few, was a remarkable thing that I treasure. He just wanted to know what you could do, not where you came from.

SG: Just one more question about students of Strauss being inspired somehow by his teaching them to venture into studying literature. What would you say to the literature professors who say: Well, what you're doing is illegitimate. I mean, you're reading works of poetry and literature like they're political philosophy. We can't expect Strauss to respond to that objection, but what would you say to that?

RC: I guess the way I would approach it is to choose an example of a book. Talk about how we're going to read it and why. I made an error, by the way, about a minute ago when I said there isn't any published material on the front material of *Moby Dick*: there's one, an essay by guy in East Texas or someplace. And what it does is to do what most literary scholars do these days: it grasps some abstract doctrine, some abstract theory and plugs the pieces into it. That's the absolute antithesis to what Strauss taught. Absolute antithesis. That's what was embedded in his metaphor about clearing your desk. If you come to a reading of *Midsummer Night's Dream* with a Marxist doctrine in your mind, you'll fail miserably because you're presupposing that you know better than Shakespeare what he was doing. In a way, Strauss always talked in commonsensical terms. It wasn't very great theorizing. He would say: How do you know? What's the evidence? What do you know about the author? You ever heard of him? And indeed, other writers do all kinds of things. There's a novelist who in one of his novels plays with the opening sentence of *Moby Dick*. Instead of saying: "Call me Ishmael," the character says: Call me, Ishmael. Give me a call on the telephone; playing with that. Strauss was playful, amazingly playful. And his playfulness carried into the exploration that I and some others have made into literary works. Not as much as I would have like to do over the years. I had a family to raise, money to earn. My wife never worked until after we had children. I was the sole breadwinner, contrary to what happens much today. I would have done more work in literature, and I'm still at times digging away at the *Moby Dick* because I think it's, well, it's the most remarkable book written by an American that I know of. Totally remarkable. And it's not political philosophy in the usual sense, but somewhere I have a copy of the journal *Interpretation* which was founded by Strauss students, and there is a wonderful essay in there by John Alvis from the University of Dallas on *Moby Dick*. It's one of the best things I've seen. But it simply does what Strauss always did: it takes one's bearings by what is said, what is done, what is alluded to, and so on.

I can't say much about what other literary people are doing except that much of what I see is boring or even appalling. And Paul Dowling feels the same way. And [as] I said, a guy I know in the English department at SUNY Buffalo had the same sense: even though he's for diversity, this is going too far. This is going too far. Just doctrinaire people who plug pieces of a work into this framework, and they claim: Voila! Great, great discovery. Unfortunately for people who do that with *Moby Dick*, they're in for real trouble because the book is so complicated, including the fact that if you read through the book at the beginning and are bored by the number and variety of the extracts, you won't slow down enough to read carefully through the extracts—trying to mobilize your courage against boredom. Really, you have to because it turns out that a key passage is one by Hobbes's *Leviathan*, embedded in a way you can hardly see it. And it's the only one of the many, many, many extracts, in fact, which points exactly to where to be found the passage, and it's in Hobbes's *Leviathan*.

Dowling and I discovered that independently of Leon Craig discovering it. So there are people doing these things, a few of us. We don't pretend to be, what, endowed with all the literary rigmarole of people in literary theory, but literary theory has become corrupt, I think. I read stuff every now and then about books that I know and I find it either laughable or appalling. Appalling not least when there is a pretention to have outsmarted say, Melville, to know what he's up to. Well, we got this theory and we apply it in liberal doses.

SG: Right, right.

RC: Strauss saw that more particularly in the field of political philosophy, because by the time I came to know him, he was in his 50's and he'd done an enormous lot of reading in all kinds of books: Judaism, Christianity, philosophy, history; and he came equipped, in other words, with a cornucopia which, in my experience with him, he never was arrogant about it. He was if anything remarkably humble, that he couldn't do anything else than laugh at some of the strange doctrines that are perpetrated about great works.

SG: One arbitrary consideration about Strauss and literature which he took seriously: he mentions several times in his courses that he's a member of a political science department and so he has to justify teaching something that belongs in a political science department. So he did teach Aristophanes, of course.

Part 4

SG: You say warmth made Strauss an effective teacher?

RC: Yes, warmth in the sense of a liveliness; intelligence working, warmth, at ease. A complete sense of mastery of what he's doing, a kind of fusion that plays itself out in the form of seeking for the profound parts of the reading but with a certain playfulness: examining it, turning it over; thinking about it in relation to what's come before, what's coming after. All of those things. It was completely new to me, completely new. Everything I'd done before had more the sense of just looking at services and taking them in but not tarrying. Some exception might be a couple of the teachers I had that taught literature, novels. But nothing like what Strauss did. Above all,

given the terrific difficulty of the text, not only wasn't he intimidated but he exhibited a kind of gladliness like the clerk in Oxford in Chaucer: Gladly would he learn, gladly would he teach. It's a beautiful way of saying it: Gladly, gladly. Open to suggestions, questions. Patient but also stubborn. You had to really push him hard if you thought you had a point. And he was clever. Long years of doing it and enjoyment of what he was doing. The day we walked in the corridor in the quadrangle, and he spoke about it being a Golden Age—I think he'd just come from doing a seminar or something. It was a beautiful spring day; it was lively discussion; and it was a Golden Age.

We were a group of veterans in his classes: Storing, myself, Cigliano; and Walter Berns, Bob Goldwin—all of us were veterans of World War II who'd managed to escape being killed and were back to get an education. People like myself utterly depended on the GI Bill of Rights to get there. And he clearly enjoyed the presence of such a stalwart body of students, obviously. Anybody who's ever taught—if you get a group of good people in your class, that's wonderful.

I remember when I taught at SUNY Buffalo here, years and years ago, I was teaching a course on political philosophy. We read Plato's *Republic*. And I had in the class a young woman who was a double major in political science and English. She also was a musician, played the flute. She was very intelligent, very sweet-natured. Smart. And I had them do an essay on something in Plato's *Republic*, some question just about how to look at what happens over the course of maybe a section of the book, or some theme. They had to face up to writing it for themselves. This is before the time of internet sources. And so I gave one on Plato's *Republic*. I gave it a B-minus. She came raging in: How can you give me that? I'm an A student in English, in political science. Not in my course. She was mad as hell. She went away. Next work: Machiavelli's *Mandragola*, a wicked play. She wrote an A-plus paper. Ten or fifteen years later, I got a letter. She was finishing a doctorate somewhere but she said: I must write to you and say [that] I finally discovered what you were doing. She knew all along what I was doing, but the truth is it wasn't until then she could formulate exactly for herself how to do that sort of thing. So. Strauss had that sense, students reporting back to him what they were doing, writing, and so on. And he exuded confidence and enjoyment the minute he entered the room, put the books down, took out his little pencil with the scraps of paper. God knows what he was writing, probably in German shorthand. And he would proceed that way for, what, two hours or whatever the seminar was. And people would straggle down the corridor, go up to his office, go up to the tea room. There was always the same sense of lively inquiry guided by pressing need to understand what was being argued, what directions it was taking, what examples were used.

When I did that little thing this morning just spontaneously, I realized for the first time that I think this is maybe the only title of a Wodehouse book that comes from the Psalms, perhaps the only title in the corpus from the Bible. Things like that, which you notice after a time and quickly see what's happening. In this case, it gives a sense of the book which, when you know the historical background, is the reality of him writing it, mind you, imprisoned by the Nazis in western France. So I think the sense of *Joy in The Morning* was a sense of his being finally released from this life. So that's as much as I can say.

It was a joy to be in the classes. It was a sterling occasion. And a lot of people who weren't taking the courses for credit would show up, listen to the discussion, go away. And there was a

particular group of people, by the way, who made it all the more even poignant for me. A man named Ernest Vogelmuth,[36] who did his Ph.D. at Chicago in some other field than mine. And a woman named Avi Ellis.[37] Vogelmuth was a boy growing up in Berlin and was sent by his family to England to get him out of Germany, and he grew up in England. Went to the LSE. Came to America and taught for a while, then he came to get a Ph.D. He was a refugee from Nazism. Avi Ellis, whom he eventually married, was a refugee with her family from Austria. They got out through some hook or crook and some bribery, I think. Came to Chicago where her parents worked in one of the hospitals. Avi and Ernest married. I last saw them in England. They are both deceased now. They were part of a group which included Gerald Stourzh[38] from Vienna. Morgenthau hired him initially, and then he went back to Germany around the mid-60s. I visited him in Berlin, him and his wife in '64, in the fall. Then he went back to Vienna, where he still is. This was a cluster of people I was very much a part of during my work at Chicago, and that added to the enjoyment of it. You know, we would joke about what the old man is getting up to here, and that sort of thing, you know, just the way graduate students do this. Smart alecks having a good time—above all, enjoying themselves.

By the way, a while back I saw Bob Faulkner's statement about Strauss as a teacher[39] which he put down, and he echoed my own sentiments, namely, up until Strauss took you in hand so to speak to read some important book, it was always sort of droning on the surface: this is this; this is this. There was very little excitement, just a kind of routine telling of this and that. But there was no power to it, no dynamism, no sense of digging down, going for the sense of radical, going to the root. And he never varied from that. Whatever the text was, it was always digging for the root; explication of details which were often there on the printed page but weren't perceived as being what they truly are. He would have liked—maybe he didn't know it—you know the book by Norman McClain, *A River Runs Through It*?

SG: Yes.

RC: Paul Dowling tells me that since Benardete used as an epigram to one of his own books—a sense of the McClain thinking is seeing something which reminds you of something else you saw, which ends in your seeing something which isn't there. That sort of dynamism, in which the one thing provokes your interest and suddenly it blossoms out into something else, which in turn moves to another level. And that's what Strauss would do fairly regularly. The one paper I did on the *Discourses* was like that. I, for the first time, felt reasonably comfortable using that technique, analysis to interpret a series of chapters. And Strauss was pleased with it. He was a tough master in that sense. He was, I think, a fair grader but he didn't put up with nonsense.

SG: How did he grade? You would give a class presentation and he would record a grade for you on the presentation?

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[36] We are unable to provide details about this individual.
[37] We are unable to provide details about this individual.
[38] Gerald Stourzh (b. 1929), historian of constitutional history and foreign policy, was at the University of Chicago in various capacities from 1951-58.
[39] Faulkner statement on Strauss as Teacher: see "Strauss as Teacher Conference" on the Leo Strauss Center website.

RC: Presentation but also class participation when others were reading, the whole thing put together.

Part 5

SG: About Strauss's teaching—I mean, the gladness that he brought to the classroom. I think that's a very interesting way of putting it.

RC: Yes. Gladness. Gladness in part having to do with, I think, with a simple human reality that he was now secure at a first-rate institution, had money coming in; he could do what he damned pleased within some sensible limits. He was incompetent to teach physics; he wouldn't have tried to do that anyhow, but within the perimeter of what's called political philosophy, he could do what he wanted. And he had time, energy, and money to live while he worked on things that were not at all part of the political science curriculum, namely, Jewish studies of various kinds, things that he wrote, things that he was editing. He was a whirlwind of activity, when you look at the record.

SG: I've heard that in these classes in the early '50s, that he often went long over time.

RC: Yes.

SG: So the class would be listed for an hour and a half, and he'd continue taking questions for some time afterwards.

RC: That's right.

SG: How long did those classes last?

RC: Sometimes it would be another hour or something; this going on sometimes in the classroom, then in the corridor, then up in the tea room. It was kind of a Pied Piper sort of thing, because he had serious, mature students. In other words, the core of it was a group of veterans of World War II who were way behind in their careers. I was three years behind, and Storing and all those others were exactly the same. Walter Berns was in the Navy. And when we got there, it was indeed like the Promised Land: we got into the first-rate place that we wanted to go to and we dug in, and when we discovered the riches that Strauss was opening up, it was sheer clover. All my life, it was the happiest period of my life in the sense of the most exciting and enjoyable working. Working. Not just in Strauss's courses—Herman Pritchett did a very good constitutional law class. Leonard White did well with a dry subject called public administration—and a first-rate scholar. We, in other words, had one hell of a group of people there. Not all of them did I get to know; for example, I didn't know Morton Grodzins[40] much, but he was available. Strauss was exceedingly available in a way that we just finished talking about it.

[40] Morton Grodzins (1917-1964), professor of political science at the University of Chicago.

But earlier you raised the question about him feeling perhaps that he could not venture into some maybe literary works of the curriculum. I don't know about that one—whether he tried, failed, or didn't want to try, I don't know. I never talked to him about it. He certainly would have been prepared to do it, I suspect.

SG: At the beginning of several of the course transcripts, you can see that he feels the need to justify why in a political science department they're reading such and such text.

RC: Like Aristophanes.

SG: Well, it was common for many of his courses that if he was teaching the Plato's *Republic*, he would begin by explaining why. One of the questions he would take up at the beginning of the course would be: why in a political science department we would read this dialogue. And so I was just suggesting he took seriously the need to present materials that were appropriate for his position as a teacher of political philosophy in a political science department. In another kind of department, he might have taught different kinds of courses, possibly.

RC: It's just possible. But he had a rich catalog, so to speak, of untaught things: things he'd worked on, obviously, and he would have written but had not yet taken to into a course. I don't know what the politics was, so to speak, was in the background. My sense is [that] because Herman Pritchett was chairman of that department at the time—he was a very, fair-minded man. He was very fond of Strauss personally, thought him a wonderful scholar and teacher. So I think he would have been quite cooperative, but the underlying issue was, and remains in some respects, the narrowing of the focus of what's called political science. At its beginning about a century ago, the founding of the Political Science Association was part of a movement imported, in part, from Germany, for example. American scholars went to Germany to study and they got this sense of some sort of scientific inquiry which was then translated into different terms in America; and once computers became available nothing could stop the flood of so-called empirical studies. Meanwhile, the questions about the regime, which was central to Strauss's way of thinking—questions about the regime sort of fell off the table, so to speak. You weren't going to get into those questions because—well, I mean, if you take the structure of *Natural Right and History*, he takes up the question of the fact-value distinction, he takes up the question of claims of historical hegemony following in phases and so on, which made the study of political science look to be a different kind of thing, particularly on the empirical side.

When I taught here at Buffalo we got a heavy dose of people coming in. The university dean wanted that, as a matter of fact, to teach courses on the kind of materials which could readily be subjected to tabulation: all kinds of rigmaroles in the way of polling data, voting data. Oh God, that's green pasture for an empiricist. Some of it important and interesting, but a lot of it fairly repetitious and not very much to do with political life the way citizens are compelled to live it and choose to live it.

Strauss was a very great encourager of the citizen perspective on what's going to be studied. He held up two men—this is no news to you—he held up two men as beacons: Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill. He regularly recommended that people get Lord Charnwood's biography

of Lincoln[41] as a first-rate way to read about statesmanship. And he had high praise for Churchill, not least because he had saved Western civilization by refusing to give in to Nazi Germany until he could get help from the States and so on.

And so I was in uniform, by the way, in Belgium the day the war was declared ended. And they had public speakers all through the city set up by the Signal Corps, and we heard Churchill's voice live declaring the end of hostilities. It was a chilling moment. It was a gorgeous May day, streets filled with people. That evening, for the first time, little children saw streetlights on. A child six years old had never seen streetlights, living in darkness. So there was sense of sheer euphoria. And Strauss was not there of course, but he knew of that kind of sentiment and what it meant. And his toughness in defending liberal democracy is one of his great contributions to American civilization, I think. He, for example, was clearly very much in the background providing sort of moral support to Herb Storing for the work he did on the Founding, the anti-Federalists.[42] That work was not work he himself would do, but he knew that it was important to do just on general principles, and it wasn't being done otherwise. Same with the volumes that Ralph Lerner[43] collaborated on the Founding, the three volumes on the Constitution.[44] Those are rich treasures houses which were in good part derived from moving over from political philosophy per se into founding as a particular political phenomenon. So yeah, I mean his sense of the Declaration was immediately broached in the opening of *Natural Right and History*, and the leading question is whether this country still adheres to that. Well, the truth is, since I studied with him there's a hell of a lot of people in political science who seriously doubt it. The most appalling misuse of the Declaration of Independence is by Obama. Every now and then he dips his fingers into the well of language of the Declaration. Utterly fallacious, utterly. People don't say a word. He claims to be a follower of Lincoln. My God.

SG: You know about Storing, and Diamond, Bob Goldwin, Bob Horowitz, Ralph Lerner, Harry Jaffa, he had a large number of his students who—Walter Berns—who ended up working, doing significant work on American political thought.

RC: That's right.

SG: Do you have some sense about how that happened?

RC: I think I go back to my metaphor about osmosis. It's the sense of the radical, going to the roots as being radical—seeing how things begin, for example. Founding is a peculiar institution of things that happen. One of the reasons I got so interested in doing the little essay on *Midsummer Night's Dream* is that it has about it the aura of a founding, a founding of Athens, which is not least important because the obvious fact is that eventually Socrates appeared. He

[41] Lord Charnwood, *Abraham Lincoln: A Biography* (1916).
[42] Herbert J. Storing, *The Complete Anti-Federalist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
[43] Ralph Lerner: see "People."
[44] *The Founders' Constitution*, ed. Philip B. Kurland and Ralph Lerner, 5 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

doesn't appear in the play but he's there in the shadows, I think, as a possible entrant, so to speak.

And so because most of the people you've named and myself included were veterans of World War II, they felt a kind of moral stake in making sure that the foundations of their own regime were being protected. There was a certain protectiveness about it which continues, I think, and it was seen through that by people like Jeremy Rabkin, who came later: Harvard Ph.D. with Harvey [Mansfield], now at George Mason. And yes, so what Berns and the others did was to make a very solid case for the remarkableness of the founding of the American regime. Remarkableness, and it is. It is. Every time I go back and read some of those documents, I'm astonished. It was a perilous time, you know. The Revolutionary War was not a done deal, I'll tell you. The tenacity, the courage of Washington and some of the others, and Lafayette, were absolutely indispensable to bring it off at Yorktown. So yes, I think a real element of the most dignified sense of patriotism was involved and it proved to be helped by—

SG: How did Strauss's teaching help and inspire that dignified patriotism, if it did?

RC: I think it did. Not always directly but always, always at the level of, what, openly-declared principles which can be tested with experience. Openly-declared principles. We stand for the principle that all men are created equal. Lincoln, when he did the great speeches about the crisis of the house divided, drew on the one hand from biblical material, but also most importantly from the founding materials: the Declaration of Independence.

When I did the essay, the introductory essay to my little book called *Four Pillars*, it was a revelation to see how the kind of Lincolnian language was omnipresent in the debates in the post-Civil War era in Congress about rights, about natural law, and all of that sort of thing. So there was a kind of welling up of pride in that affiliation, and I think that in part was what inspired people like Walter [Berns] to do the kind of work they did and, through him, students he's had who've had students—now we're into the fourth generation, in effect. And that has certainly not pleased many people in academia, to say the least. It's seen as a threat, threat to the autonomy of the kind of political science which is still the dominant form. When I taught at Buffalo, SUNY Buffalo, we had at one time three full-time political philosophy people: myself, Friedman, and Douglas Whatley, then Glen Thoreau. Four—we had four at one time. Now zero. That's happened very much across the country. Modernization, all of these things. Some important work—but political philosophy is sort of squeezed at the margins: We don't have the resources. Well, that's just a fairy tale; they could have the resources but it's not supported. On the other hand, it's been encouraging to see—a couple of the meetings I've gone to, the APSA meetings, one in Toronto, one in Boston—to see that that form of what you're talking about, namely, the work of Harvey Mansfield and people like that has been well attended at the political science meetings.

SG: I mean, I can't say that I'm in touch with what's happening with the profession. I'm not involved.

RC: Good.

SG: But my sense is there is an eager enthusiastic audience for serious work in political philosophy in the American academy.

RC: That's right. That's right.

SG: Even if it has been squeezed out of some institutions, when people encounter it, they're interested.

RC: That's right, that's right. There's a kind of native curiosity, you might say, coming to bear. And I think also a kind of, what, a kind of reaction in part against the sense of scientism taking over, the *false* claim of science. In other words, the very categories we use in universities and colleges are boundary categories: You're going to teach political philosophy, don't you dare do anything with Shakespeare. Well, that's nonsense. Philosophically speaking, it's puerile to suppose that you can cut those sharp boundaries. Take, for example, the *Ecclesiazusae* of Aristophanes. Here are the women running this city, which of course is hilarious. Why is that? Well, because they aren't fit to run the city. Yes, they are: they're in charge. And so one time when I taught the *Republic*—couple of times—I had students read the *Ecclesiazusae*, and it was interesting that two of the best women students I had were in the class one time, and we read the play, and I had some of the kids act it out and I sort of hammed it up a little bit. Well, the two women in question, both went on—one of them went on to get a Ph.D. and a law degree; the other one's a law degree. They were affronted by the fact that when we hammed it up in class that the crucial scene when the young man would like to have it with his young woman, is told by one hag and then another and then a third: Me first, sonny. Well, the two women in question were affronted. I could tell that. I invited them to my office either that day or another time and we talked for a while. They began grudgingly to say they saw the point. Well, the point is of course, in vulgar terms, that men don't get erections to screw old hags. And anybody who thinks that the law can require that ought to get the Colney Hatch, which is the famous nut house Wodehouse speaks about. There is a limit to what law can command. And that limit is set by human nature, which can't be overcome by any persuasion techniques, let alone by any threat of force. You're going to screw this old hag. No, I'm not. Yes, you are. No, I'm not. Ah, what an absurd conversation. But things like that which are so fundamental to understanding what political life is about seems to me every justification [to their] being taught in the political science department.

I was fortunate at SUNY Buffalo, partly because I came here as the leading political philosophy person, I taught just what I pleased after I finally got here. And I taught courses like Rhetoric in Politics, where we read and thoroughly examined *Julius Caesar*. Another course was on Literature in Politics, where I took up *Gulliver's Travels*, among other things. And the students loved it. Loved it. I made no pretense of doing anything that I was justified, because it was works that treated fundamental problems. If anybody didn't like that, that's too bad. One of the privileges of having tenure, as you damn well know, is you can at least have greater freedom to work as you want. And it was a wonderful life. Coming as I did from a working family, to be able to live as I did then: teaching two semesters, and then going to my house in Maine for the summer, it was utopia. Utopia.

SG: You had your own golden age.

RC: That's right. Yes, the courses I taught were—just an example: American political thought was a staple of the curriculum for a long time. When I took it at Northwestern as an undergraduate, it was a dry as dust course: We will now read a little bit of one the old Pilgrims; and then we'd do a little bit of this. Then we'd read a little Calhoun and so on. It was dull, deadly dull. When I took over the course after the guy teaching it retired, I said: We're going to do something very different. We want to talk about American political thought, about fundamental problems. So we read the four organic laws doctrines. We read George Anastaplo's[45] book *Commentary of the Constitution*. Then we read *Benito Cereno* of Melville on the problem of blacks. In other words, with thematic courses we used any works that were relevant, and it worked wonderfully.

And as far as among Strauss students, people who comment on these things, there's this saying of Strauss's that went something like: When you teach, you should remember that in your class there may be someone superior to you in heart and mind. A famous saying of his. Well, I learned that lesson time and again. One time when I was doing a course where we read *Gulliver's Travels*, I was very happy with myself because I finally perceived that there's something wrong with the structure of the book. And I brought it up in class in an indirect way, and a young woman down front put up her hand and said: I can see why. I thought I was a smart guy; she got there way ahead of me. It's a salutary thing to happen. You ain't so great. Yes, teaching activity is slow hard work, but it's an eminently humane one.

The students liked this guy Belsen.[46] He's a man of great intellect. He'd be successful no matter what he did anywhere. He came to me having done a degree in Ireland and then some work in Germany, and when we first studied Plato's *Republic*, he thought I was nuts by concentrating on the drama of the dialogue. What is this about? We're talking about philosophy? Well, he eventually came 'round and when he did, he could see the sense it made, the doors opening to an entirely different way of thinking about that great book called the *Republic*. And so when he worked on Machiavelli, it was wonderful to see what he would do. He would come to my office, and the door would be open, and I think people in the department thought we were drinking because we were laughing all of the time. Every time he would come: Well, I see something new. And we would talk about it and then we would laugh. Next time he would come: same thing. It was simple joy to have a student who's that good, that interested and so independent, so eager to do his own work. And now he is a really successful man in the world of diplomacy, ambassador for his country to all kinds of places in the world, including India, which was an eye opener for him.

SG: Do you think that there was anything in particular in Strauss's teaching that facilitated this osmosis for our Americanists? Is there anything that they would learn in studying Plato or Machiavelli that would then open up for them the field of American political thought in a way that those coming from inside disciplines would not readily see—give them some new purchase, some vantage point?

[45] George Anastaplo: see "People."
[46] We are unable to provide details about this individual.

RC: Yeah. I think one facet of that (I speak most about my own case immediately) [was] the realization of what had happened in Germany. The destruction of the Weimar regime, the formation of the Nazi regime and the incredible, terrible things that happened thereby was there to some extent all along. We escaped, Walter and I and the others. We made it home safely but we damned well hadn't forgot. I was shipped to Europe in the spring of 1945 just as Roosevelt died. The war clearly was nearly over in Europe. The troop train that led from Le Havre over to Vernier, Belgium moved at night. And along the way was an eerie sight: we would come into small, poorly lit railroad stations on the French railway line, on the line going from Le Havre over into Belgium. And what did we see? Cars full of people who had finally made it out of concentration camps, by the hundreds, in their striped uniforms, many of them looking emaciated. Grabbing up and gobbling on the spot cheese and bread and wine brought to them in the station by local people as these trains brought back the surviving prisoners, the surviving ones. I never saw the camps. I didn't want to, but we people knew about them. And I saw with my own eyes what the residue was: the camps gobbled up millions. These were the lucky ones who got home.

And so when I went into graduate work, attracted by Ken Thompson into the fields of international politics, then the layer added by Strauss, was pretty much where I then stabilized, doing work in both parts of the discipline. But to my mind they overlapped; there wasn't a particular distinction between them. And I won't speak for Berns and Storing and so on, but they all had that sense of digging for roots. And digging for roots meant, to your surprise, things coming to light which you hadn't expected. I mean, for example, Herb Storing's very fine work in bringing to light the anti-Federalist papers to go along with the Federalist papers, restoring a sense of dialogue, dialectical treatment which otherwise had been absent. The good guys won, right? We won't talk about—well, they're not bad guys, anyhow, it turns out. They're other guys. They had some reservations, to say the least, about the size of the federation, about the ways in which it would trample on local rights and so on. Look at the problem exactly today.

SG: You had mentioned when we were out for lunch how Strauss treated you and the other veterans with a real humanity. Do you want to say something about that?

RC: I think he was childless, but he had a beautiful adopted daughter, Jenny, who considered him her father, and a son. He had no children of his own, but he couldn't help but be aware of the terribleness that had happened to so many German families, for one thing. Secondly, he knew he was at one of the great universities now, and that he was getting a crop of students who were really gung-ho to go forward. And because the problem of the regime was all about what happened in Germany, the question is what was in store in the United States possibly down the road sometime—the need somehow to build barriers against that. How much of that was explicit and conscious at the time, I don't pretend to know, but I greatly admired it as it came out: the Lerner volumes, the Storing materials, because it was such a rich feast, a feast. If you want to see something about the objection to the federal power of taxation, not only read the Federalist Papers and the Constitution and the early laws, but read the anti-Federalists. Why did they so object to some version of the Constitution? And to bring that back to the surface was to do a job of civic responsibility carried out.

SG: So that one of the things that Strauss imparted to his students was the need to understand the best grounds on which the American regime could be defended.

RC: That's right.

SG: And to lay bare what the original arguments for that regime were.

RC: Absolutely. Regime: the word regime, which is a French word, means regiment, meaning organization, meaning—the dialogue called the *Republic* is called *politeia* in Greek, and that means something like the political ordering. We have a regime which is called a constitutional republican democracy. It's republican because it has all the classic features of a republic, namely, not direct democracy but voting for and being ruled by those who are representatives. I had lunch a while back with some friends and they asked me if I was a Republican. I said, in effect, I'm a small "r" republican. I'm officially registered as a neutral but I have voted for Republican candidates in recent times. But republicanism as a representative system was at the root of the groundswell of madness in the '60s. Direct democracy was the cry. I escaped from Berkeley just about the time it was breaking forth as a cancer there, only to have it transported to my campus here. Rampaging on the campus, destroying property, tearing up libraries—all of it on the grounds that the war in Vietnam is unconstitutional or something. That it was a bad war, I grant you. It was a terrible war. But the insurrection that was taking place! I was proud to accept the invitation to become a member of a reviewing committee which was specially appointed by the acting president to give hearings to those students who were picked up on campus for violating laws. And I felt a responsibility as a faculty member and a citizen to try to engage in even-handed justice to those who were incurring the threat of being prosecuted. I was not liked for it by some of the faculty. There was a group of faculty called The Thirty.[47] [Laughter] Yes, and they were in violation of the law in the sense that they were being paid by citizens who worked in garages downtown to teach students at the university, and they were on strike with the students on the grounds that they were all for the students. I never missed a class. Chanting went on outside my classrooms. It happened—by God, the most providential thing, come to think of it—when the worst of that madness was going on on campus, we were reading Burke on the French Revolution. These students could peer out the window and see what was happening. It was a remarkable coincidence. I hadn't planned it that way, but they saw the destructiveness of this kind of rampage. And to claim we want direct democracy was almost, what, almost childish. In a country of 200 million people, what are we going to do? Take a poll by telegraph sites or something? Just the practical notion. But above all, the failure of American college and university education to teach these students about the American regime, which is a republic not a direct democracy, and it doesn't want to be; it shouldn't be. So I think, Cigliano and Berns and others who work in that area of political science were profoundly aware of that. And the need to challenge the way, the attempts to overturn it. Did you have Cigliano on your list?

SG: No, no.

RC: He was—is—a very good man. He's now retired from Boston College; lives up in Maine.

[47] "The Thirty Tyrants" ruled Athens after its defeat by the Spartans in the Peloponnesian war in 404 BCE. Their rule was particularly brutal and violent.

SG: Oh, I see. Do you, do you think Strauss—he came to City College as an émigré, spent most of his life in continental Europe; he'd spent a few years in England—do you think he learned anything from his experience with the United States that he didn't already know from his study of philosophy, history, literature?

RC: That's hard to say. That's hard to say because I don't know the inner workings of his mind. But I think what he learned, direct, first-hand experience was the, what, the liveliness of America: the quickness; the adaptability in wartime, for example; the eagerness to get ahead; the pride in home and family, which he saw first-hand for the first time. And he became—I think I mentioned earlier the episode where he told the guy who'd come to take him to the lecture at Cornell: Well, I'm watching Gunsmoke; I'll be there by and by. He had that sense of the American, what we call general culture, I guess. He had a sense of being very aware of it and very curious about it. He liked Bob Hope, for example. He liked that kind of joke, and frankly his remarkable ability to learn American slang and so on was, I thought, remarkable. English is not an easy language, and to have piled English of that kind on top formal English let alone all of the other languages he read, was something. But he would read the *Sun-Times* in Chicago. Students would talk to him about this or that political issue. Faulkner reports that one time he, Faulkner, made some denigrating remark about FDR, and Strauss sort of cautioned him and said: Don't do that, because Roosevelt helped to protect Western civilization by eventually bringing America into the war. So he had that kind of sense of nuts and bolts political things, which he viewed with a sort of a curious and investigating eye. But because of his what I've called his "Gladly do I teach, gladly do I learn," he learned about America in direct ways, including some its foolishness, which he was never taken in by. But on the other hand, he was sheltered, too. He had students who took him places and he would go to them and so on, so he didn't lead the rugged life as some émigrés had to do. I don't know about his background in New York, how he lived there, but finally once he was settled in Chicago in a house, apartment not far from the Midway, he was quite content. He watched the television. He read the newspapers. He was no Ivory Tower guy.

SG: You've spent a lot of time thinking about international relations. Your first book on Locke, *Locke on War and Peace*. Did, in the courses you took with Strauss, did any teaching about international relations come through? He never, obviously—he never taught international relations as a subject, and so it would only be something that would come through along the way through talking about the author he was interested in.

RC: Machiavelli on war. Absolutely. This would be the prime territory for him. It happens to be in the third book that I did my best essay that I wrote for him, namely, on that third book which is about foreign relations. So he didn't see these boundaries the way people do. Partly from his own experiences—but partly from reflections, namely, the protection of the regime is the first law when the chips are down, in other words. To protect the regime, you have to do some things you otherwise wouldn't do. Take the Civil War suspension of the writ of habeas corpus. It's still argued about. But Lincoln thought it absolutely indispensable because without it he was going to be overcome by an amount of insurrectional activity which couldn't otherwise be checked. Warfare took primacy at that point. Not to say that he didn't realize he was acting "quote unconstitutionally" in a very limited sense, but that he dared to risk it because he saw what the

danger was. And so Strauss saw that sort of thing with very great admiration: the very fact that Lincoln put his very existence virtually on the line and had a reasoned argument for doing so and the incredible tenacity with which he did it. How he came to have such an appreciation so early for Lincoln I just don't know; I never talked to him in detail about it, but it was clear that the two men that he held out to all of us: Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill. Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill. And he was clearly the inspiration for Harry for his great book called *The Crisis of a House Divided*, which is still one of the very best books ever written about the coming of the Civil War. A wonderful book.

SG: If you were to try to summarize—and this is perhaps not a fair question—if you were to try to summarize if Strauss had a teaching on international relations or understanding of international relations, based on your experience with him, what would that be?

RC: The inevitable, or nearly inevitable formulation of a policy which centers upon the need for sovereignty, that is, the protection of the political society is the first law of nature taken from the, what, the most necessitous level. Without that protection, the internal regime will collapse or be destroyed. So in that sense, my book took up the following question. Hobbes writes with very great clarity about the supremacy of war in forming the regime. Locke seems to be much more, what, reticent or different. At the beginning of my book, I quote some learned experts about these matters and without a question they all say Locke is very different. Locke is very different. I wanted to find out. One of the great things that happened was—as I had hoped would happen—I found materials particularly at the Bodleian library, where the greatest amount of the material is, but also in the London British Museum, I found material which to any sensible person showed very clearly Locke's own rhetorical strategy. One of the short notes I have somewhere in my book is a note—he did commonplace books, commonplace meaning he would write passages from books he was studying, and one of the entries I found, which I nearly cheered out loud when I saw what it was, he said something like: Therefore, in these circumstances where you have to protect yourself and protect the regime, you have to be a blank. You have to be reticent, reserved. It fit perfectly with the underlying argument that I was making. But what it didn't do was to convince some people who felt that I was somehow defaming Locke. Defaming him. Why, he's an honest man, he couldn't possibly keep things in reserve.

What I finally did, for example, was to work out an analysis of the chapter on property. It's the most valuable part of my book. It's never been refuted—sniped at, but never been refuted. What I did was to see the structure of that chapter and to see the way in which the Christian teaching—the biblical teaching according to God's providence, caring for us and so on—starts to be undermined because within the structure on the chapter on property, he gradually removes the support for that biblical principle and replaces it with one which is a Hobbesian one: state of nature. State of nature. The natural materials of the world are almost worthless, almost worthless for the sustaining of life. And one dramatic pairing of the kind that I eventually formulated is about seeing. One of the things that Parkinson says in Volvian[48]: double vision. I can no longer drive and do other things because of double vision. In Aristotle, in the *Metaphysics*, he opens by saying: All men by nature desire to know. And one of the indications of that is our desire to see things—look, see things. We're curious about them, we want to know what they're like. In a

[48] We are uncertain whether this is what Cox said.

footnote that I put in the book, maybe it's in the text, Locke writes: The eyes are the great watchmen of our safety. The complete turning upside down of the Aristotelian position. Aristotle's no fool, he knows perfectly well that the eyes in combat are vital to you, but it cuts it off from the ascent to the level of wanting to know for the sake of knowing. So when Strauss started to make arguments, as he did, about the low but common denominator, he knew what he was doing, namely, resorting to that first passion which is the absolute terrified fear of self-destruction—or of being destroyed, rather. So to the extent that Strauss would be considered a supporter of the view that sovereign states are indispensable, I think that that's quite right. He at times made remarks, come to think of it, about the poor quality of that thinking which seeks to organize the whole world into one political regime. The fear of tyranny was always present in him. He saw it. He saw it. He fled it. He had no illusions about what could happen. And related to that is a theme which he found in Churchill, by the way, namely, great caution to the point of fearfulness about the advent of increased technology: atom bombs, now drones, and so on.

So Jeremy Rabkin said about my book one time, 'cause he teaches international law and he saw it—he said it's a great book because it does exactly what is needed, namely, to clarify the way in which the Lockean formulation of our political society is hard headed. So Jeremy has written various things about the attempts to, for example, invade the province of legal activity in the United States by the International Court of Justice, and so on. He seeks to protect against that. He has a mind [that] in part works like mine. I know that from him; I talked to him. Strauss never wrote anything extended that I'm aware of about these matters, but you can piece it together readily enough from some of the things he'll say about the *Republic* and so on. The image of the noble dogs. Guardians, *phulakes*. That book, by the way, is the most—I sometimes think if I were to have to go into exile someplace I could only take three or four books, I would take the *Republic*, the Bible, and Shakespeare's works, and that would be enough. Maybe Thucydides, too. But the Bible, the *Republic*, and Shakespeare's works would be quite sufficient. And you'll search in vain for any deference to the notion of world community in Shakespeare. It's a—to put it crudely, it's a soft-headed view. Soft-headed. E. B. White of *The New Yorker* was all for it. E. B. White wrote gracefully but he didn't know what he was thinking about, to be so inclined to subordinate the relative freedom of the American regime to a regime God knows of what kind. Some of that is—some would say about that: that's Machiavellian. Well, I'm afraid that Machiavelli knew some things quite well. If you read Strauss's book on Machiavelli, you'll find them. It's a book of unbelievable thoughtfulness. Unbelievable attention to the text. When I was about to do a dissertation, we conferred a little bit, and he thought: Maybe you should do it on Machiavelli, but then it's a jungle. He didn't think I was yet up to it, and I agreed with him. So I took on the job of doing Locke, which was more accessible to me, not least because it was in English, and it wasn't as complicated and difficult. So in that sense, he always to my mind gave sound practical advice: Your Italian is not very good, you do French well, but that's not enough. You've got to be able to cope with the intricacies of these structures. And this was just before he was bringing the book on Machiavelli into shape.

SG: Did you consult with him? This was about what the subject of your dissertation would be. Did you consult with him when you were writing?

RC: Not very much.

SG: Was he on your dissertation committee?

RC: He was on the dissertation committee, but he was also in Jerusalem part of that time.

SG: Did he comment on your dissertation when you were done?

RC: I don't recall that he did, because the committee that sat, which sat for the final exam included a man from the history department named, strangely enough, Locke,[49] sitting in, I think, for Strauss—just a convenient thing to have somebody from outside the department, I guess. But no, he did not participate in that because he was in Israel, or I think in Israel. Michael Zuckert did tell me some time back, I think, that he was working on the transcript of the Locke seminar that Strauss once did.

SG: That's right.

RC: And he said something about my dissertation, I guess—about the book that came out of it, saying something complimentary about it, I think. I've not seen it. He was a tough teacher in the sense he had rigorous, high standards but he was very generous with his time in helping you. Because I was working far away in England at the time, I had to do what I could, and I did. But then I realized when the manuscript was accepted by Oxford, I quailed and I had to completely rewrite it, which is the form it now takes. Great experience to do that kind of research on a great figure.

SG: I think so. Did Strauss—

RC: Tarcov, by the way, has written very good stuff on Locke.

SG: Did Strauss's teaching—did he have a project in teaching? Was he trying to accomplish something in particular?

RC: Yeah, to bring back to a limited number of people the activity of thoughtfully reading the best books. It's simple as that, in a way. What are the best books? God knows, Plato's *Republic* by all accounts, is one of them. Now we can tick off another list: Herodotus's history; Thucydides's history; Hegel, yes; Kant, yes. Locke, Hobbes, yes. But you don't go very far on your hands and feet before you begin to run out of candidates. And that was the sense he conveyed. One of the most puzzling aspects of what he did do was what he didn't do. He didn't forthrightly treat Heidegger.

SG: Right.

RC: And that's the man in the background. The title of his book called *Natural Right and History* seems to be an echo of the title of Heidegger's most well-known book, *Being and Time*. I'm sure that's deliberate: a riposte in the form of a dialectical treatment of problems of natural right. But I never conferred with him directly about that. Some of the other students, I think, over

[49] We have been unable to identify this individual.

time did, and they've written about Heidegger. I don't know German so I couldn't attempt that. I was spoiled by the facility I had in French. I studied French in college; I knew it very well. When I went to France, I learned to speak it. So at that time Chicago had only one language for the Ph.D., so one day I tripped over to the room and took the French exam and that was it. I didn't have to exert myself to learn German, which I should have been required to do, but I didn't. But he has students like Gillespie who's written about them. Is he on that list, Michael Gillespie?

SG: He never studied with Strauss.

RC: Oh, that's right. He didn't.

SG: Did you consider Strauss a friend?

RC: Not really. He was more reserved and aloof than that. I was very young, a kid really. He was a middle-aged man who'd suffered terribly from the political ravages of the war and of having to decamp. And I think that the people who became more truly friendly with him were some of the students like Laurence Berns. When I last saw Berns before he died, in Annapolis, he told me that when Strauss was hospitalized, I think, for the heart attack, Strauss became more—not chummy, exactly, but more just open about addressing him as Larry, which he rarely did with students. I was always Mr. Cox. He was Mr. Strauss. He was Mr. Cigliano, Mr. Storing. That's the way it was. I think he despised being called doctor or professor because that was too elitist. He was in a modern republican democracy and we don't have that stuff. But no, he was not friendly the way Ken Thompson was, for example, but that's a very different relationship. He wasn't friendly certainly in the way Herman Pritchett became friendly (chairman of the department). But that was—it was not in my mind a defect, it was simply what he preferred and what he felt justified in doing. He wasn't palsy with students at all, not that I have ever observed. He was dignified throughout and I liked joking with him and so on, but it wasn't on the basis of the kind of familiarity which some academics have fostered in later times, namely, we're kids together or something. He'd have found that distasteful, I would think. He was a man of the old school in that regard: you don't easily call people by their first names.

SG: Summing up, how do you think of Strauss today, looking back?

RC: Beacon of light leading the way out of darkness. The darkness was in part personal, partly shaped by the rigor and intensity of the Lutheran form of Christianity; also darkness in the sense of what in the world are we doing in this world? Why do we do what we do in the way of treating human beings in certain ways? What is the good of making more?

My oldest brother was a Marine in World War II, served in the South Pacific in terrible combat conditions; he was not only a ground combat man but he did aircraft electronics. My brother Fred was a year and half in the South Pacific. He came back, served out his time and so on. But how much Strauss knew about our families, I don't really know. I never talked to him very directly about mine; maybe a very little bit. But he was warm toward me. He once said at a certain time in the years I was there, he said: You and Storing, you are among my best students, which I took as a very considerable compliment and tried to live up to it the best I could, under no illusions that I would ever be anything like him—the reach of his mind, the extraordinary

learning he possessed. It was a sobering thing to be confronted with a man of that stature, and learn from him without presuming for one moment to be like him. And he was aware of that on his side. He knew perfectly well that most of his students were of reasonable intelligence but not with the great learning that ever would come to them. He was of German mode of the best kind, which was sabotaged and destroyed by the Nazis. And I guess this guy Heinrich Meier[50] is now seeking somehow to resuscitate some of it, some of the dignity of academic research and matters of politics, philosophy, law and so on.

SG: Oh, I think he is someone who wants to help promote the serious study of Strauss and serious thought generally. I mean, he's written very interestingly about Rousseau, for instance, Heinrich Meier has.

RC: Yes.

SG: So looking back, you see Strauss, Leo Strauss as a beacon of light?

RC: That's right. Gladly would he learn and gladly would he teach. His classes just were wonderful to go to. They were tough: you had to really concentrate and work: read ahead of time, be careful. But because so to speak the doors always kept opening to new compartments concealed initially from view. What is he doing here now? I mean, for example, I learned from him about Machiavelli, about the need to look at the ways in which Machiavelli knew perfectly well not only the Christian but the classical understandings of certain principles. In an essay I did on Aristotle and Machiavelli on liberality, I put that to good use where I addressed the chapter which lists the good things and the bad things, and saw how intricately it was connected to, among other things, the Aristotelian treatment of the virtues in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This is the thing, the kind of thing he taught me. But he taught me only in the remote sense that he taught me how to go; then it was my job to do it. And I did it as well as I could. It's still one of the best things, I think, I've written, that along with the essay on Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. By the way, I learned recently by googling something that some publishing company has swiped that essay of mine without paying me.

SG: There are a couple of websites now that get around copyright laws.

RC: I'm sure they do.

SG: Those are all my questions for today. I don't want to wear you out, and I think we've covered a lot of ground.

RC: I have, I think. It's been a pleasure to do it because my regard for Strauss remains very strong. He helped me get out. My life as a child and adolescence and so on was a nightmare. Father barely getting to work, finally in a machine shop—dangerous, dirty work. Kids having scarlet fever, being quarantined. Neighbors who were drunk, vomiting on the house. Barely any food to keep going. Strauss helped ensure that I stayed out by helping me to get enough education to get a teaching job which I loved doing. I had a very, very good life. Still have. If

[50] Heinrich Meier, see "People."

you can get up and go to the art gallery and have lunch, you're in good shape. And you saw how attractive it is—apart from the paintings inside, I mean, but that's another story.

[RC asks about the Leo Strauss Transcript Project.]

SG: We hope this will be valuable. I think that for those people who are seriously interested in—well, I think that for those people who are coming to Strauss from you know, just from nowhere, that have no knowledge of him, I think that hearing about the personal contact with him and what role he played in people's understanding, I think that would be a very helpful—

RC: I agree.

SG: —to more serious consideration of him. For those who are seriously interested in him, they're either going to study his books, but they're not going to spend a lot time listening to things like our conversation, but—

RC: There are better things to do. Like read Aristophanes.

SG: Yeah, but there is matter here for thinking about what the philosophical life is.

RC: Sure is.

SG: That if you have a dozen conversations of people who were profoundly influenced by him, you have—each one gives you a little fragment of, you know, from their perspective, what they experienced, how they understood him. And each of those—you can see it as a way to begin thinking about what it means to be a philosopher in twentieth-century America.

RC: That's right. It's like the old story about people studying the elephant.

SG: That's right. [Laughter]

RC: Parts of this one. I got the trunk. That's not a bad metaphor, in fact, because some of the nasty criticism of Strauss is really rooted in almost, what, criminal neglect to read carefully. Just stupid sort of stuff. And all the more reasons to protect his image of a philosophically-minded man who, drawing in part on the great tradition of these great books—but drawing on the terrible experience of what World War II meant—has served up a what, a menu of wonderful things to read and think about, including books like the *Republic*, books like Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*. Not a huge number of such books, which would be a very fine foundation. Aristotle's *Politics*. If you did the *Republic*, Locke's two treatises and maybe Machiavelli and so on, half a dozen books, you'd have all you could do to take a good big dip into the pool of understanding. I was lucky in that I landed there just as he was taking off in the Chicago part of his career.