

Harry Jaffa
Part 1
December 18, 2012¹

Stephen Gregory: The Strauss Center is devoted to publishing the surviving audiotapes and original transcripts, or the transcripts from the digitally re-mastered audiotapes of Strauss' courses. And on our website, we have published the digitally re-mastered audiotapes. Anyone can listen—if a tape survived of Strauss, anyone can listen to it on our website. And we're in the process—²

Harry Jaffa: Over a period of seven years, I attended every single one of Strauss's classes. Nineteen courses. So.

SG: Right.

HJ: Do you know Nathan Tarcov?

SG: Yes, I've known Nathan since I came to the University of Chicago. Right. And he's the Director of the Leo Strauss Center. Yeah, so as I—our main project is publishing the tapes and we are editing the transcripts of Strauss's courses and publishing those either in print or online. And a secondary project is we're interviewing those who have studied with Strauss about their memories of him as a teacher. I, we have so far interviewed Victor Gourevitch, Hilail Gildin, Laurence Berns, Stanley Rosen, and Werner Dannhauser. I expect next month to interview probably Ralph Lerner and George Anastaplo. And I expect to interview Bob Faulkner.

HJ: Who, Bob Faulkner? Is he in Boston?

SG: Yeah. And that is probably the surviving students that I'm aware, from his first generation of students.

HJ: Not his first generation. All of that you mentioned are second generation.

SG: Okay.

HJ: Because his career was equally divided between the New School and the University of Chicago.

SG: Right.

HJ: And I spent five years with him in New York.

¹ The Strauss Center thanks Edward Eler for reading the transcript of this interview and for his help with details.

² The conversation is interrupted by a phone call.

SG: How did you first come to know of Leo Strauss?

HJ: I got the whole story. It's written down in my new book.³ It's a collection of essays from over about a 35-year period, but I wrote a new chapter to introduce the whole collection, and there I told the whole story about it. I went to Yale first and had a year of graduate study at Yale. And I left Yale in the spring of 1940 because I was totally dissatisfied with the course of study at Yale in the graduate program. I'd been an English major as an undergraduate, and I didn't know exactly how I would continue my studies. My only ambition in life, since I was a freshman in college, was to be in an academic career. And I was told in the spring of my freshman year at Yale (that would be 1936) [by] my faculty advisor—I was making out my program and I said that the only two courses that I'd had at Yale as a freshman that were any good at all were government and English. I told him, I said: Whichever one I majored in, I'd do the other one in graduate school. So he asked me: Why go to graduate school? And I said: To have an academic career. He said: You can't have an academic career.

SG: Why did he say that?

HJ: Because you're a Jew. Before World War II, the liberal arts colleges were 99 percent—I mean, Einstein could get an appointment, but there were a few very famous sociologists who had appointments. But, so I decided to go ahead anyway and see what would happen, and fifteen years after I had that interview with my freshman advisor at Yale, I had my first tenure-track appointment. And the man who hired me was this man who had been my faculty advisor in 1936. His name is probably familiar to you through his son rather than himself: that's Harvey Mansfield.

SG: Yes.

HJ: Anyway, in 1940 there were no jobs. The job situation was much worse than it is today here. I couldn't—the urgent necessity was to get a job. I thought that was an urgent necessity, and my father thought so even more than I did: five years at Yale and you can't even get a job. So I found the only profitable employment that I knew about was the U.S. Civil Service Commission had a program called Junior Professional Assistants; they were recruiting college graduates into the federal service. And the only option available to me was public administration, a subject which I despised and loathed and hated. But it was the only chance—⁴

SG: So you were saying you found a civil service job in public policy.

HJ: No. What I did was find was a way, a means of getting a job through the Civil Service program. But I had to take an exam. I knew graduate students at Yale who'd majored in public administration who'd flunked this exam. I was pretty good at taking exams, but I knew I had to study for it, so I did. And I found out that there was a place called the New School and somebody

³ *Crisis of the Strauss Divided: Essays on Leo Strauss and Straussianism, East and West* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

⁴ The conversation is interrupted by a phone call.

giving a two-semester course in public administration there. His name was Arnold Brecht.⁵ That name mean anything to you? He was quite famous in his time. He was a great teacher and he was a good friend of mine. And so I took his courses and I took the exam, I think it was in April of 1941, and I passed it. I don't know what grade I got, but I was on the register. And I went down to Washington and I got myself a job.

I didn't have any place to stay in Washington at that time, so I signed up for a boarding house which was managed by a cousin of one of my father's bartenders. I think it was either a Sunday or Monday morning—I think it was a Monday morning, July 14th 1941. I came down to breakfast. I had signed in the night before. It was only one other person in the room, and she came over and welcomed me to the boarding house, and I found myself looking in the face of the most beautiful girl in the world. And I got a picture I can show you. And I hadn't expected this: I was looking for a job, not a wife. [Laughs] But I knew the wife was more important than the job anyway, so we were married eight months later. She died September 27, 2010. Anyhow, all my good fortune up to that point, and beyond, was due to the fact that I'd taken exam and courses in public administration.

So she worked in the War Department; I worked in a variety of agencies, war agencies. I never did any work—there was one or two exceptions—that was worth a damn. And I came to have a loathing for government employment and all I wanted to do was to get back to school.

I'd had a good relationship with Brecht, who was a very fine teacher, incidentally. He gave another course which I took, which was on the end of the Weimar Republic. He'd been a judge in Weimar, Germany. He was tall, very good looking; very—he looked like the *megalopsychon*. You know what that means? Gentleman. *Megalopsychon*, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. And Strauss was the exact opposite. Brecht was tall and stately; Strauss was a little guy who was as physically unimpressive as anybody could be. But in the fall of 1944, we went back to New York and I registered in the graduate school. There was a course by one L. Strauss on Rousseau. I thought that was meat and drink for me, so I signed up for that.

SG: So you simply picked up the catalog and saw there was a course on Rousseau?

HJ: Well, yes.

SG: And that's what you brought you to Strauss.

HJ: Well, my major interest was—my interests have been remarkably consistent over a long lifetime, because when I graduated as an English major there were three authors who were the most important in my life and who I wanted to learn most about: Plato, Aristotle, and Shakespeare. I mean, the other author is Abraham Lincoln. And I never had a course in American history and in fact, if I had, I probably would have been ruined as a Lincoln scholar, because—well, how I discovered Lincoln is another story.

⁵ Arnold Brecht (d. 1977), German jurist and government official in the Weimar Republic until 1933, when he emigrated to the United States. He was a lecturer at the New School. He returned to Germany after World War II.

SG: Before you attended that class, you had never heard of Leo Strauss?

HJ: No. Nobody had. In fact, if he hadn't gone to Chicago, I don't think I could've had a career either, because he was my principal professor at the New School. But nobody knew about *him*. There was a period of about ten years when I think the greatest faculty ever assembled under one roof was at the New School, which just lasted about ten years and I was there at least five of those ten years. And it was an amazing place. All these top professors from the German universities were refugees. And so I would have had to make the famous European tour if I'd been the son of a rich man just to touch bases over there, and I wouldn't have known who they anyway. So Strauss's recommendation of me wouldn't have done me any good until he went to Chicago, which gave him a platform and more students. Most of the students at the New School were high school teachers getting extra credit for—one or two. David Lowenthal⁶ was one. You have him on your list? He's at Boston. He was chairman of the department there for many years.

SG: Yeah. I thank you for reminding me, he had slipped my mind. Actually, I didn't know he was still alive.

HJ: Well, I keep getting things from him.

SG: I'm sure you're right. I'll check on him. When you attended that first class, what impression did Strauss make on you?

HJ: Well, I wrote in this autobiographical introduction in my book that nothing had prepared me for Leo Strauss. The pure intellectual force. Overwhelming. The first impression is this funny little man with a weak voice. In those days, he was a little bit on the rotund side. Later on, he had a heart attack and he didn't weigh as much, I think. But he was just in his early forties. Let's see, 1944: he would have been 45 years old, because he was born in 1899. So anyway, I said: "Every book was a treasure island and there was a map to the treasure but you had to decipher the trap."

SG: The map.

HJ: The map. And his whole theory of esoterism, I put it in sort of a nutshell. Incidentally, I've since heard that the two greatest heroes in Strauss's life, you know who they were?

SG: I couldn't guess.

HJ: One was Winston Churchill. The other was—I have trouble with names. The great German chancellor.

SG: Bismarck?

HJ: Bismarck, yeah.

SG: If I tried, I might have guessed Churchill; I wouldn't have guessed Bismarck. But that's very interesting.

⁶ David Lowenthal: see "People Mentioned in the Interviews" [hereafter "People"].

HJ: Yeah. There was a good deal of German patriotism inside Strauss too, although he made it clear that the only salvation in this world for the things he valued was the United States of America and Israel.

SG: Right. The spirit of Bismarck seems far away from both of those. But that's—

HJ: I have published one book of essays on Churchill called *Statesmanship: Essays in Honor of Sir Winston Churchill*,⁷ which was planned for Churchill's 100th birthday. We missed it by about ten years, but it's got some excellent essays in it, one by Wayne Thompson on the German naval treaty before World War I, and I think you can see there the Bismarckian wisdom. There's a famous cartoon, I'm sure you've seen it somewhere, called Dropping the Pilot.⁸ It shows the Kaiser leaving Bismarck. Anyway, but Strauss loved Churchill, and I might say that the one great book that I introduced Strauss to—he didn't introduce me but I introduced him—was Churchill's *Marlborough*,⁹ which I began reading in the spring, I forget of what year. The first volume of Churchill's war memoirs—and an excerpt [was] every day in *The New York Times* for a while. And then *Life* magazine had a weekly edition, and during those times both Strauss and I, each morning we would look for the excerpts from Churchill's *The Gathering Storm*. And I remember when the excerpts were finished, I was still so hungry for Churchill that I discovered his *Marlborough*, which I think is his greatest work. There was a set, five-volume set at the library at Queens College, which is where I was teaching at the time, and I remember using that edition, which I now own a copy of, and telling Strauss about it. And then of course he then went and got . . . up.

He had an amazing range of reading. His published writings are usually so narrowly concentrated on the text and he almost never refers to the scholarship on that text—mostly, in other words. The only secondary work that he ever recommended that I can think of, and it's a very important one, is Fustel de Coulanges' *The Ancient City*. He always referred to that. But I remember walking into his office at Chicago one day [and] there was a copy of a new translation of Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*—a big two-volume work. And I said something to him about it: "Life is not long enough for us to read all the things we want to read." He said, "Oh, yes. I just re-read it."

So. And his main source of American political, of American history was Charnwood's *Lincoln*,¹⁰ which is still the best introduction to Lincoln. Anyway, I don't know if that gives you something of the flavor of how I—?

SG: Yes, it certainly does. Do you remember how he conducted his classes at the New School?

HJ: Well, I was in every one of them, so—

⁷ *Statesmanship: Essays in Honor of Sir Winston Churchill*, ed. Harry Jaffa (Carolina Academic Press, 1982).

⁸ By Sir John Tenniel and published in *Punch* in 1890.

⁹ *Marlborough: His Life and Times* (1933).

¹⁰ Lord Charnwood, *Abraham Lincoln* (1916).

SG: Okay.

HJ: He had his text for the day. He had notes written in it with these little, stubby pencils. Did you know about his pencils?

SG: Well, I've been told that he would use a pencil until it was completely worn out.

HJ: Yes, right, and he seemed to prefer them when they got little. And he made all his notes with these pencils. He once told me that in two weeks' time he couldn't read any of his notes. He had to have them transcribed, you see. I took down, in machine dictation, the first three or four chapters of *Natural Right and History*. I was a terrible typist, but if I didn't have to look up and back, I could move pretty fast. So. He had little—in contrast with his notes, he had these little spiral notebooks where he would write out, where he could still read his own handwriting. There's obviously some subtle psychological connection between his esotericism and his disappearing handwriting. One time he couldn't find any of his pencils and he came out and I . . . He accused me of stealing his pencils. [Laughs] I said, "Dr. Strauss, who would steal your pencils? You're the only one in the world who would have any use for them at all." [Apparently imitating Strauss]: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

SG: His colleagues there at the New School—how did Strauss fit in? His relations with the other faculty there at the New School?

HJ: Not too well. He got on; he always had a good, polite manner. And the only one that he really had any intimate relationship with was von Blanckenhagen.¹¹ He really respected—von Blanckenhagen had convinced him that you could read a statue the same way that Strauss read a Platonic dialogue. Somebody should do something with von Blanckenhagen. I don't know whether he has an archive or where it is.

SG: I have no idea.

HJ: He did have an essay. There was for a time a magazine called the *Chicago Magazine*. You know about it? It only lasted, I think, a few years, but I know that Blanckenhagen had an essay on "La Famille de saltimbanques," which wasn't quite on the level with Strauss's writing, say, on Plato. But it was very, very good. Do you know what the *Famille de saltimbanques* is? Well, for a long time, it was the Picasso painting that you saw when you entered the Chicago Museum.¹²

SG: Art Institute.

HJ: A family of clowns, and a very large canvas. Go take a look at it someday, and see if you can look up the von Blanckenhagen article. Do you know what von Blanckenhagen, what he looked like?

¹¹ Peter von Blanckenhagen: see "People."

¹² The painting is in the collection of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

SG: I only heard a few stories about him, but I don't know.

HJ: He was a cripple and I don't think he weighed more than 60 pounds or something like that. Very—just skin and bones but a very spiritual look on his face, which might have been due to the fact that he was so thin. But I always regretted that I didn't get to take any courses with him, but I was only there two years, then I—then Strauss went to Chicago. By the way, I had a letter from Strauss in the summer of 19—let's see what it was—1948, I think it was. That's right. I was with my wife and the one child we had on his wife's farm in Missouri, or his wife's mother's farm. I didn't get along with the old lady there, so I didn't spend too much time there. And he told me about the offer from Chicago. And at that time, I didn't have any job. My three years at Queens had run out, and for the years 1948-49 I didn't have any regular paid employment at all, and I had a family to support. As a matter of fact, I did get some teaching. I got three sections of Intro Economics, of which I knew nothing at all, at City College, which is where Joe Cropsey¹³ was teaching. So Joe really rescued me.

And so Strauss knew my predicament as well as I did, really, and he said that he would make the acceptance of the job at Chicago contingent upon their getting me a job. He said that when he got there it would be easier to arrange it rather than—but he actually, I think more than anything else, boosted my morale, letting me know where I stood in his estimation. The first thing he did when he got to Chicago in January of 1949 was he paid a courtesy visit to Hutchins.¹⁴ Hutchins said: Is there anything I can do for you, Professor Strauss? He said: Yes, you can give Jaffa a job. So the next thing, I had offers from all over the University. I took the one with the downtown college because I was still working on my dissertation. Things worked out pretty well.

SG: Why did Strauss make the move from the New School to Chicago?

HJ: Well, actually it was not the money, because the salary he got at Chicago, which I think was \$10,000 at that time—which, by the way, was the salary that a Sterling Professor at Yale got in the 1930s. And instructors at Yale I think also got started at \$2500, which is the salary I got at Queens in 1945.

And he also had an annual supplement from the Jewish Theological Seminary. He got one—didn't have any outlets to publish his stuff; the only place that he was sure of one article a year [was] in *Social Research*, and one article a year with *Annals of the Academy of Jewish Research*, and he gave an annual lecture there. But I have a story to tell that I learned from my friend Marvin Fox at Ohio State about Strauss at one of his lectures at the Jewish Academy. After one of his lectures, the audience was leaving and a very famous scholar there, I don't know who it was, was overheard to say: "What a shame. What a shame. What a terrible shame. What a great Talmudic scholar he would have made, instead of wasting his life on philosophy." [Laughs] So that give you some idea of the milieu that he—. Well, he felt very much at home in Jewish

¹³ Joseph Cropsey: see "People."

¹⁴ Robert Maynard Hutchins, President of the University of Chicago from 1929 to 1951.

circles. He had a great loyalty to the Jewish right like Benjamin Netanyahu.¹⁵ Talked all the time about the Jewish state. I tell my students, it can be Jewish or it can be philosophic, but it can't be both. No such—but, anyway.

SG: Was Strauss's Jewishness important to his students?

HJ: It was important to me, I know that.

SG: In what way?

HJ: Well, I never had a direct conversation on the subject, but I heard him speak often enough about the things that were closest to him. So, well, I would say it was the same thing that was represented when Socrates said: I was not sprung from a rock or a stone—from a rock or a tree. So you have your roots. And there was only one—do you know anything about the autobiographical preface that he wrote in 1960? He spoke about a young Jewish boy in the Weimar Republic and he says in that paragraph that all his work, the dimensions of the—what's the word I want—the theological-political dilemma. I think he uses the word dilemma. How can you be loyal? And by the way, in an essay I published in the—I forget, on Strauss's hundredth, which is mostly incorporated in my new book, I am as far as I know the only Straussian who's even noticed the fact that in the introduction to the *City and Man* (you know that book, *The City and Man*, 1959?)¹⁶ that he speaks about the divine city of righteousness. Athens and Jerusalem disappear into one, something he said was impossible. [Laughs] The same parameters that I . . . so far as my inferior understanding goes apply to myself.

I remember if his classes fell on one of the High Holy Days, he would cancel the class. But he didn't go to the synagogue. [Laughs] I remember wondering about that and never daring to ask, but nosing around to find out. But he spent the day reading Plato. So he was very loyal to—.

Have you seen the letter that Strauss wrote about Israel in 1956?¹⁷ That was originally a letter addressed to Willmoore Kendall.¹⁸ Then it was reassigned to *The National Review* and published . . . in *The National Review*. It's a beautiful letter. He never did anything that wasn't beautiful. This ugly, little man. [Laughs]

Incidentally, did you see the letter that Jenny¹⁹ wrote to the *Times* at the time that an English classical scholar reviewed, I think, *The City and Man* for the *New York Review of Books*?²⁰ And I wrote a letter, one of many; I think one by Joe Cropsey. It was a nasty review, and it was a stupid

¹⁵ Strauss probably knew little of Netanyahu himself, who was born in 1949 and became leader of the Likud party in 1993.

¹⁶ *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

¹⁷ *The National Review*, January 5, 1956.

¹⁸ Willmoore Kendall: see "People."

¹⁹ Jenny Strauss: see "People."

²⁰ M. F. Burnyeat, "Sphinx Without a Secret," *New York Review of Books*, May 30, 1985, a review of Strauss's *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

review, too. And I had a private correspondence with this guy, apart from the things that were published, and he had said that—I forgot exactly what it was. He was part of a class of British scholars who—they loved Plato and they hated Aristotle because Plato was a communist.

Well, I think that what he said in one of his letters was that according to Aristotle only a philosopher could be a free man. Aristotle looked upon—had aristocratic pretensions, whereas Plato, at least, was open to communism. And he quoted—²¹ Well, I was able to locate the passage in the *Politics* that he was using and he misunderstood, absolutely misunderstood the Greek. My Greek is not that good anymore, but it was pretty good at that time. This was 30, 40 years ago. And what the hell is his name? I wish I could retrieve all of the correspondence. I don't know if it's on my hard disk or not. But a cartoon in the issue of the *New York Review of Books* that had this review had on the cover a picture of Strauss with two right hands. [Laughs]

SG: So, yeah, I remember this controversy, not with the detail that you do but I read the correspondence, the published correspondence. Going back to Strauss's move from the New School to Chicago, you say it wasn't the money. He didn't move because of the money. Was it because of the Press?

HJ: Well, at the New School he—to paraphrase Socrates, who said that he dwelt in thousand-fold poverty, Strauss dwelt in thousand-fold obscurity. He was anxious for recognition as much as anybody. As much as he despised recognition, he wanted his share of it. And Chicago is the nearest thing to an Ivy League university not on the west coast or east coast, and I don't think there was a moment's hesitation there. He was going to be given it and, God knows, he made good use of it.

SG: Strauss's desire for recognition: Do you think that was simply a desire for fame? Or do you think there might have been an element of wanting to use that for something, wanting to use the recognition? What do you think really mattered when it came to this—

HJ: Well, he has in several places, most conspicuously in the introduction to *The City and Man*, he said everything he does is dominated by the crisis of the West. I know at one point, as part of my ongoing dispute with Walter Berns,²² who at one time was one of my closest friends, turned against me in a really nasty way. And Berns wrote: Jaffa has the delusion that he can save the West, you see. My answer to that: Yes. In spite of being delusional, all I need is one student in front of me whose soul I turned away from the evil to the good. And that was Strauss. He certainly—well, let me put it this way. I wrote something about it recently. I think that my dissertation, which was on—

SG: Aquinas, right?

HJ: A study of the commentary by Thomas Aquinas on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, I said that—

²¹ The conversation is interrupted by a phone call.

²² Walter Berns: see "People."

SG: I'd forgot. I also read your Aquinas book. It was the first one that I read.

HJ: That's the one I would urge you not to read, but—

SG: Somewhere on my bookshelf at home is a large mimeographed copy of it, because it was no longer in print at the time I picked it up.

HJ: What I think may make it worthwhile is that it was the 50th anniversary issue, and I wrote a new introduction; and in that introduction I said that when I wrote this book I thought that Thomas was trying to make Aristotle safe for Christianity. Now I think that he was trying to make Christianity safe for Aristotle. By the way, in Strauss's view of Thomas, and mine—I don't whether one influenced the other or not, but he had the same—what he says about Thomas Aquinas in the *Natural Right and History* is not his later view. The things that he criticized Thomas for he later came to think as devices to preserve Thomas's—.

SG: So Strauss's desire for fame you see, at least in part, in service of a larger project to save the West?

HJ: Yes. And the West meant, above all, Athens and Jerusalem.

SG: Yes. Did he seriously consider, you know, saving the heritage of the West, or was it more along the lines of your remark just now about reaching one student and turning them around? I mean, was the idea to reach a few people and keep things alive, or to really make a change in the overall culture?

HJ: Well, for I don't how many hundred years, Aristotle was known as *the* philosopher. And it would have seemed almost insane to say to Thomas Aquinas to write a book on ethics. You write a book on ethics, you write a commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*. You can't go beyond that. I wrote the initial chapter on Aristotle in the Strauss-Cropsey history,²³ which was dropped from the third edition because—you probably don't know anything about that, do you?

SG: Well, I don't know why it was dropped. I know that it's no longer in the Strauss-Cropsey.

HJ: It's the only time that Joe and I really had a disagreement. But at one point, I forget, long before there was a third edition even thought about, I wrote a letter to Joe in which I said if there is a third edition, I think you should consider these alternatives: one, a chapter on Lincoln to match the one on Burke; and one on Shakespeare. In the last 400 years, there have been only two people who have assimilated the entire teaching of Machiavelli and still rejected it. The second was Leo Strauss; the first was William Shakespeare. In a way, Shakespeare is in some respects the most important single figure in the history of political philosophy. And I have two chapters

²³ *History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (University of Chicago Press, 1963). The second edition was published in 1972 and the third in 1987.

on Shakespeare in the Alvis-West book on *Shakespeare as a Political Thinker*.²⁴ One is a long essay on *Measure for Measure*, and the other one is—and it began as an impromptu talk at the end of the conference in Dallas on Shakespeare, and the title I gave it was: “On the Unity of Tragedy, Comedy, and History.”

Socrates, at the end of the *Symposium*, says that the true poet will write both comedy and tragedy, and no Greek poet wrote both tragedy and comedy. *The* poet who wrote both tragedy and comedy was William Shakespeare. So I just mentioned that. So the chapter on Shakespeare, if it had been included in the Strauss-Cropsey history, was mostly written already. Well, I don’t know whether Joe thought that this was a power grab on my part or what, but he wrote back to me to say there would not be a third edition and my suggestions were beside the point.

The next thing I know is some years later, I get a form from the University of Chicago Press, asking me to release my Aristotle for the third edition. I found out that [for] the third edition, there were numerous changes which were made. All of them good, as far as I can tell. The problem is that the Strauss-Cropsey history is verging on the point where it either had to become two volumes or expand . . . So I was put off by that, and so I didn’t sign the form. I deeply regret it. I think it was a great mistake on my part. Both of us made mistakes, and it didn’t change our personal affection for each other at all.

But my Aristotle chapter belongs there, if it’s ever reprinted. Carnes Lord did a good job, but he only used about half as much space so he couldn’t have done as much as I did anyway. But I heard many people after the first edition was published [say] that—my Aristotle chapter. By the way, getting the assignment to write the chapter on Aristotle is that . . . and Leo Strauss on Plato. Oh boy, I was just paralyzed with fear.

SG: How did that assignment come to you? Did Professor Strauss write you a letter and ask you to do it, or did Joe contact you?

HJ: Well, I’m sure contact was made, but as far as I can tell, there was never any difference of opinion among any Straussians. And incidentally, might I say that my text, that my dissertation, I think it’s the only time in history that I know of where a dissertation was accepted by a press before it was accepted for the degree. But that was—at that time, Strauss’s recommendation was—nobody else had—. And also, when a job opened up at Ohio State and I decided that was the place for me to go at the time, Strauss’s recommendation was—well, neither the University of Chicago Press nor Ohio State would have paid the least attention to a letter from Leo Strauss if he was at the New School.

SG: Right. I understand.

HJ: So that was one of the great breaks in my life as well as—

²⁴ *Shakespeare as a Political Thinker*, ed. John Alvis and Thomas G. West (Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2000).

SG: As you may know, Nathan Tarcov is now Strauss's literary executor. Joe asked him to take over that role. And so when I return to Chicago—no one that I know of has discussed a fourth edition, but I'll mention to him that, you know, that your essay on Aristotle, you'd like to have it considered if there is a fourth edition.

HJ: Yeah. Well, fine, thank you. It's still in print,²⁵ by the way, in my 1975 book, *The Conditions of Freedom*.²⁶ That book, which also you might take a look at it, has a remarkable beginning, because it begins with a eulogy to one of my beloved students who died in Vietnam, and it's followed with my eulogy of Leo Strauss, and then the Aristotle. So that's a story by itself, my tribute to Billy Patterson, with whom I used to go bike riding. And anyway, the story: He was serving at the Naval—as captain of a Naval helicopter gun ship, the kind that went right down into the swamps. And he completed a year's service and was waiting to be reassigned, and his fiancée was waiting for him in Hawaii and they were going to get married. And his replacement didn't arrive in time, and rather than for his teammates to do extra duty he volunteered to serve again. And his plane was shot down. So that's the—anyhow. But my student, my teacher, and Aristotle.

SG: Yes, I understand. So Strauss moved from the New School to Chicago. That would be 1949?

HJ: January 1949. By the way, one of the things that—the result of his going. The custom at the New School was you had to complete your dissertation and then you had your general oral examination. Since Strauss was going to Chicago, they decided to give me the oral examination before I completed a dissertation. And there is a story about that in my eulogy of Joe Cropsey. One of the subjects I was examined on was economics, and I was going to be examined by Adolph Lowe,²⁷ who was one of the bright stars at the New School at the time. So Joe went and read all of Lowe's articles and then he drilled me on it—drilled me mercilessly until I was just a parrot. He pressed a button and I came out with the answer. So I said that when the exam came, it was just *déjà vu* all over again. All I had to do was remember the button. And I was a great success and I got summa with my degree. And I said, in my last line of that part of my eulogy was: The hand was the hand of Esau, but the voice was the voice of Jacob.

SG: So. And you followed close behind Professor Strauss to Chicago?

HJ: The only quarter that I—the only time I missed any of his classes in a seven-year period. He went there in January and he began teaching, I think in the spring semester. And I got there in July. And from then on I went to every one of his classes.

SG: And was there a difference in how he conducted class in Chicago from how he conducted it at New School?

²⁵ The Aristotle essay.

²⁶ *The Conditions of Freedom: Essays in Political Philosophy* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).

²⁷ Adolph Lowe (1893-1995), German sociologist and economist.

HJ: Nothing changed his approach to how to teach a text.

SG: In the transcripts we have, which—the record of the transcripts only begins in 1954 and only really begins in 1956. I mean there is this one in '54, and then in '56 there are a couple, and after that it picks up and it's pretty regular, but—

HJ: These classes here are taped too and I have those tapes.

SG: Well, we have tapes of lectures that he gave at Hillel House in Chicago. But we're very interested in the tapes of the classes he gave here²⁸ on the *Apology* and the *Crito* for one semester; and on Rousseau for the second semester.

HJ: No. I don't know exactly what's on all. I didn't go—when Strauss was here I didn't go to his classes. I thought it would be a distraction to have two senior professors. The Rousseau one shouldn't be that important because the chapter on Rousseau in *Natural Right and History*, I should think, represents his mature view of Rousseau. But whereas in the case of Plato, you can't tell the—

SG: Certainly. I mean, the—and, you know, we've had a lot of conversation, discussion about the worth of these transcripts and tapes, and it's clear that in most cases, if one wants to know his mature views, one doesn't need anything other than his published books. I mean, he published on Xenophon; he published on Plato, Aristotle.

HJ: I don't think anybody—no study has been made of all of his Xenophon writings. And Xenophon was his favorite, number one favorite.

SG: But there are things to be learned, you know, from the transcripts of the courses, and there's intense interest in them. I mean, we have had inquiries from all over the world once we got started. People want to know about what Strauss was doing. They're very interested to see these transcripts.

So you felt Strauss's teaching at Chicago, that he used the same method as at the New School?

HJ: Yes.

SG: From what we can see with the transcripts, in the first session or two, he would give a kind of an introduction to the topic as a whole, and then he would begin reading the text, whatever it was, a few sentences at a time and he would have a reader. And the reader would read the text and then Strauss would comment on it.

HJ: Just like Thomas Aquinas. That's what Thomas Aquinas did.

²⁸ That is, at Claremont.

SG: Do you think that there was some imitation on Strauss's part, or was it an accident? Was he—did Aquinas give him the idea?

HJ: The first course that I took with Strauss was on Rousseau, and his view of Rousseau was the exact opposite of what it became. Rousseau was a secret disciple of Socrates, and everything else was exoteric. He completely rejected that later. But the second course I took was one on Kant and Aristotle, in which actually we read Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* first and then we went on to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. And it was when we were reading passages from the *Nicomachean Ethics*—there is a famous passage, 1134b, where Aristotle says about natural right: All is changeable. I now think that's the way in which one must understand the virtue of *phronesis*. But then Strauss bought in commentaries by Averroes and Thomas Aquinas and read them in class to shed light, and that is when the iron really entered my soul. My God, I began reading medieval theories. My Latin wasn't very good, but you don't need good Latin to read Thomas Aquinas. It's like basic English. So that's when I started in the spring of 1945 to work on my dissertation, even though I'd only had one semester. But what he said about Kant at the time, as far as I can remember, was definitive. I mean, Kant was the antithesis of Aristotle; and then Aristotle [says] natural right was changeable, but with Kant the categorical imperative was unchangeable. There was room for rational discrimination among ends or means. So anyway, I remember that course; that's when I became a wholehearted convert. Strauss is responsible, you might say, for my suspended agreement with him because he himself changed his mind about Rousseau. But he never changed his mind about what Rousseau had done: he was the father of Kant and Hegel.

SG: It's been said that when Strauss first arrived at Chicago that he was not the polished teacher that he became. Was that your observation?

HJ: No.

SG: You think he was a very effective teacher from the beginning?

HJ: Absolutely.

SG: What made him an effective teacher?

HJ: Well, in my essay, which is—I don't have a copy of it here—I said that Strauss's secret was that he didn't make you feel that he was telling you what to think. You thought together. It was an enterprise which you shared together. He was the captain of the ship but you sailed together. And I think at one point compared to Odysseus going past the island of the—

SG: Scylla and Charybdis—no, I'm sorry. The island of the Circe.

HJ: Yeah, except that you all went strapped to the mast with your ears open.

SG: I said Circe; I meant sirens.

HJ: That's right. The queen of the Sirens: her name was C-i-r-c-e in English translation.

Anyway, I said—even an episode once when Strauss’s students at Chicago, including myself, we started referring to him always as the old man. And he heard about it and he was offended. We explained to him that the old man meant the captain. He might be the youngest man on board the ship, but he was the commander, so we called him the old man. So then he was very satisfied.

SG: That’s a beautiful formulation, that when he taught he made the students think that they were thinking with him.

HJ: That’s it. Very much so.

SG: Do you think this came naturally to him? Do you think this is something he learned through his studying, this way of approaching teaching?

HJ: The roots of Strauss’s . . . are complex. I’m trying to think now. Well, his Jewish education, I think, had a lot to do with it. He would have been a great Talmudic scholar. I’m not sure that he may not have been, but he knew that whole subject very well and his technique of reading clearly comes from Talmudic training. There’s a long Jewish tradition within that, which is not Straussian by any means, but when that Talmudic scholar said what a shame that he wasted his life on philosophy—there was a very keen interplay, and I remember a story he told once. When he was in Hebrew School, when the class was reading the story of Joseph and his brothers and when Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, who tried to murder him—they are reunited. The entire class cried. They all broke down in tears at how real that—. That’s Bible study: you’re not just reading about somebody else. But that . . . left that class.

And the letter he wrote to the *National Review* defending Israel: Where else is the Bible taken so seriously as the basis of education? I think even to the most rabid unbelievers among the Jewish community, when they read the Bible they read the story of themselves.

I also mentioned in my own education at Yale, I was an English major. One professor I loved dearly, his name was Alex Witherspoon. I think I had him for sophomore English, and I found out that he had a Bible reading group that met every week in his rooms. And he didn’t advertise it and he didn’t invite people, but if they found out about it, you were always welcome. For four years, I never missed a single meeting, and I think that’s by far the most important thing I learned at Yale.

Of course, you know I introduced Joe to Strauss?

SG: He told me that, that the two of you were at the New School, and that—

HJ: He was never at the New School.

SG: At City College.

HJ: Yes.

SG: But that he knew you and that—

HJ: We were in Hebrew school together before high school. I mentioned he was the brightest student in school and I was the worst. [Laughs]

SG: So how did it come about that Joe started attending Strauss's courses?

HJ: Well, he was in the Army for five years. He was in the North African, Sicilian—Italian, and southern France invasions. Thank God he survived. There were apparently plenty of close calls. I don't know how well you know Joe: he is a very rigid person, very stiff in his moral judgments, or at least he was for most of his life. Anyway, when he got out of the Army, the first thing he did was get married. I had something to do with that, too. I tell the story in—.

And then his only thought, really, was to make up for that five years that he'd lost in the Army. Now he's got to do everything, and so he would sit there and study and study and study, reading those damned economic journals and everything like that, which was a waste of his time. Well, I saw him all the time once he was out of the Army, and of course the main thing I was telling him about was Strauss. [Joe:] "That's a distraction. You're just trying to get me back. What I really got to do is read all this economic literature that was published over the last five years." And then somehow—it was many months, I don't know how many right now; at the time it seemed like forever that he finally broke down. City College—my apartment was right close by in Washington Heights. When I was teaching at City, I had a desk in the department and I could just walk from my apartment to over there. Columbia was right in the same neighborhood. So finally I got him to go with me one night.

Joe had always been interested in Adam Smith. I remember when we were still in high school, he had a hernia operation and I visited him at the hospital. He's sitting up in bed reading *The Wealth of Nations*. So he knew the difference between real economics—remember Smith was a professor of moral philosophy. So anyway, that was it, and they took to each other very well. I was writing some of Strauss's letters for him and Joe took over. [Laughs]

SG: What do you think Strauss wanted to accomplish with his teaching? I'm told that in the '50s in particular, he really devoted himself to his teaching.

HJ: He always did.

SG: What do you think he wanted to accomplish with his teaching? There are scholars who devote themselves to their scholarship and they're very poor teachers, and there are teachers who devote themselves to their teaching and hardly write a word. Strauss was very prolific, wrote profound works, and was also a great teacher. He's very unusual in that way. And many scholars would resent the energy required to teach because it does require, of course, a great deal of energy.

HJ: Do you know when I began full-time teaching? How long do you think I've been teaching?

SG: Well, it's been quite a long time.

HJ: 1945. Over sixty years. My career has been much longer than his, and I'm a lot slower. But Strauss and I had close harmony on many things but what [is] the right way to live physically, we differed. One time I had a career as a bicycle racer. Did you know that?

SG: No, I did not know you had a career as a bicycle racer.

HJ: I had my first bicycle race at the age of 46. And my wife and I rode a tandem for over 20 years. We logged in over 100,000 miles. I remember one day I stopped off one day on my way back from a ride at Strauss's house on 11th Street. He thought I was a circus clown. I had on a striped—

SG: Jersey.

HJ: Yeah, when you ride a bike you want to be conspicuous so the cars would see you. He didn't know. One time with the Goldwin conferences in Chicago—you know about those, don't you?

SG: Yeah.

HJ: I was with thirteen of those, and Bob Goldwin ended up as my enemy, I'm sorry to say. And we were very close. It was during one of the coffee breaks—I came to Chicago with two baseball mitts and a baseball in my bag. And Joe and I went out and threw the baseball back and forth. And Goldwin took Strauss over to the window and he said: You see those two boys playing ball there? Strauss said yes, yes. Well, that one boy is Professor Jaffa. The other one is Professor Cropsey. *Ach die Lieber* [rest of the phrase is drowned out by laughter].

And of course he had been a chain smoker in New York in the seminars. I used to take a chocolate bar to class with me to get the smell of the tobacco out of my mouth. Now, thank God, smoking is banned. But I've often spoken on the subject of teaching versus research and writing, and it was no division between those two things, and it never has been in any of *my* classes.

SG: So did Strauss have an intent that you think informed his teaching? What was he, what was he about? What was he trying to do?

HJ: All I can do is tell you what *I'm* trying to do. And let's begin by saying that he began his autobiographical preface by speaking about a young Jew in Weimar Germany and the principles of 1789. When he wrote that it was so 1789, that meant the French Revolution and Rousseau, not the American Revolution and Locke. Strauss's idea of liberalism—and one of his books is named—. ²⁹ He speaks about one of the turning points in his career were when he read, what the hell is the German conservative, famous name—I'm terrible with names now. Anyway, it was his critique of liberalism which turned Strauss against liberalism. Before there was 1789, there was 1760 or what it was—1670. Spinoza, and his emancipation from Spinoza and also his

²⁹ Jaffa presumably is referring to *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (University of Chicago, 1968, 1995).

learning from Spinoza. Spinoza was a greater corrupter of the young and also a great teacher. *The Theological-Political Treatise*, in my view, is the ultimate foundation of the American Revolution, because Spinoza ended his critique of the Bible with Judaism. He wouldn't go on to Christianity; that was too dangerous. Locke's treatise on *The Reasonableness of Christianity* is the book that Spinoza wouldn't write, but that's the book that turned into Locke's *Letters on Toleration*. That goes to Jefferson.

And an interesting thing which is in my work that is not anywhere else, not even in Strauss's: when Strauss—one of his really definitive writings, where he never changed his mind about what he said there, is “On Classical Political Philosophy,”³⁰ which he wrote in 1946, which was the year I was studying with him. And the central theme of “On Classical Political Philosophy” is the theme: What is the just regime? What is the best regime? Strauss discusses this question in that essay and the key discussion is in the center of that essay. It is literally the center of the essay if anybody were to measure words or whatever.

One of Strauss's definitive statements in that essay on the nature of the best regime: “Shall we not say that the form of government is best and provides most effectively for the purest selection of the natural *aristoi* into the offices of government.” You recognize those words?

SG: No, I don't.

HJ: Whose words do you think they were?

SG: [Pause] They couldn't be Jefferson's, could they?

HJ: They *were* Jefferson's. So in this definitive spot, Leo Strauss writing on the classics, the best regime according to Plato and Aristotle, he uses the words of Thomas Jefferson. Who was Jefferson's inspiration philosophically? First of all, Jefferson is obviously the main author of the Declaration of Independence. What is the Declaration but sort of a Lockean doctrine? Is it Aristotelean or is it Lockean? It's both.

Anyway, when Strauss gave his lectures, the Walgreen lectures in the fall of 1949, I was there for every minute of it. Do you have any idea of how he began the lectures?

SG: No.

HJ: It's not recorded in any of the texts. He began by quoting a medieval aphorism: “*Solet Aristoteles quaerere pugnam*”: Aristotle is accustomed to seeking a fight.

SG: Aristotle is accustomed to seeking a fight.

³⁰ “On Classical Political Philosophy,” in *What is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 78-94.

HJ: Yes, *pugnax*. Not because he loves fighting, but because he loves truth. I think that's Strauss's signature, and mine is right underneath it. Because the other Straussians don't go that way. They just talk to each other, but if you're picking a fight you're looking at people who may become your converts. So anyway. I am also the only one who has noticed that in the beginning of *City and Man* where he says that dealing with the crisis of the West, how can we address the crisis in the divine city of righteousness? And he capitalized those words: Divine City of Righteousness. How can we address them to the pagans? I don't know anywhere else where he ever uses the word pagan. But in the Middle Ages, Aristotle was called a pagan. And he was. So Strauss makes himself sound like a Baptist preacher with the gospel in his hands. Well, of course, the irony of this was not lost on Leo Strauss, but as far as I can tell it's been lost on all the Straussians.

SG: Was Strauss, was Strauss pleased with his students at Chicago?

HJ: He was pleased by them, and I think to some extent deceived by them. They weren't as good as he thought they were. And that's been some of the history of my relationship.

So I mean, those Goldwin conferences were just wonderful moments. Here's a little episode involving Strauss. Strauss didn't go to all of them. He went to two or three of them at least. And we used to have our meetings on the Chicago campus, and then we would have dinner at Chuck Percy's home.³¹ He had this elaborate mansion up on the lakefront. And you probably know something about the Percy relationship, don't you? He put up the money for these conferences. And those conferences were a great educational experience for me. These were very top people, you know. I met Jerry Ford³² there. Jerry Ford, who once told me that a speech I wrote for Richard Nixon, which he never gave, he said: If he had given that speech he would have been elected. This was literally true. You know . . . Because I was the only one in that camp who kept telling Nixon: You've got to imitate Eisenhower. He never did.

Anyway, Skip Jackson, what's his—Chuck—

SG: Percy.

HJ: Skip Jackson at that time was one of rising stars in the Republican Party and was one of the people we looked to. And he was there at the thing. He was sitting next to Strauss at one of the roundtable conferences. And that night when we were riding on a bus up to Percy's house, I was sitting with Jackson.

SG: Scoop Jackson.³³

³¹ Charles Percy (1919-2011), businessman; he served as U.S. Senator from Illinois from 1967-1985.

³² Gerald R. Ford, President of the United States from 1974-77.

³³ Henry M. ("Scoop") Jackson served as both congressman and senator, representing the state of Washington. He was twice the Democratic party's presidential nominee.

HJ: Yes, Scoop Jackson. Not Skip, but Scoop.

SG: Democratic Party. He's now—today he would be in the Republican Party. Then, it was the Democratic Party.

HJ: Right. That is why I remained a Democrat throughout the '50s, because the Democratic senators were the hawks.

SG: The party of the Cold War, right?

HJ: Right. So anyway, Jackson was telling me how much he admired Strauss. He said, he used these words: He'd never seen such a combination of—let me get this right. One word I want—kindness is not exactly the word. It was one word which meant, you might say, ease of manner—also put other people—and toughness. That was Scoop Jackson's comment on Strauss.

SG: It's impressive that Scoop Jackson would think something like that.

HJ: At one time Jackson was speaking and Strauss wanted to speak, so he just put his hand on Jackson's arm and looked at him, and Jackson knew that Strauss wanted to speak. But he did it in his very soft and gentle manner. Gentleness, I think was [the word], and toughness. So Strauss could have had a lot more influence but he took his ministry as a teacher as kind of a vocation. I don't think he ever thought of it this way, but a divinely-appointed vocation.

SG: A divinely-appointed vocation.

HJ: Yes.

SG: To do what?

HJ: To save the West.

SG: To save the West.

HJ: A world in which, first of all, in which Jews could live peacefully.

One little episode, I can tell you, which is very revealing of Strauss. Strauss was in some respects the most sophisticated human being I ever knew, but in another respect, he was very simple. And he once told me, he had some relatives in this country, I don't know who they were, who used to come to visit him once a year and they were *very* stupid people but they were his relatives. And Mrs. Strauss used to make fun of them and that used to hurt him. Why he would confide this in me, I don't know, but he did. And he'd say, certainly they are my relatives; and he would wonder why he felt hurt, 'cause he knew they were stupid, you see. They only came once a year. But he

was hurt by the fact that she would pour scorn on these poor people. Poor Jews. Have you gone to visit Jenny³⁴ yet?

SG: No, I haven't done that, no.

HJ: Well, it's very important.

SG: Yeah.

HJ: There's one thing she wrote, that testimony to her father. She called him that. She never referred to her natural parents, as far as I know. Do you know about her career?

SG: Well, I know that she's now a professor of classics at the University of Virginia. I don't know the history of her career.

HJ: Well, she was chairman of the department for a while, and she's achieved a very solid reputation as a classical scholar. She doesn't function as a Straussian but she still tries to—. She is apparently very good in Greek and Latin. Her husband Diskin Clay: the last I heard he was the chairman of the department at Johns Hopkins, I think. You might talk to him too. He was one of those who presided over the translation of Locke's letters on the natural law, which was published as a book.

But Jenny, in this one—she wrote this one letter to *The New York Times*, which was a very fine letter except she referred to him as ugly, and I don't think that's right. He was not an ugly man. He was a—you might say his physical appearance made no impression at all. Insignificant, yes; but ugly, no.

SG: I see.

HJ: But the minute he began talking, you were transported into a different world. He was a shining knight.

SG: How was he as a dissertation advisor? A Ph.D. supervisor?

HJ: He never told me. Never a word passed between us on this subject.

SG: Did he suggest it, did—

HJ: He read my dissertation.

SG: Yeah?

HJ: The last time he read it, I think it was the third or fourth time, when he was giving a course on *Nicomachean Ethics* here, and he told me: It's much better than I remembered. The only

³⁴ Jenny Strauss: see "People."

compliments he ever paid me in class had the same formula: Well, Mr. Jaffa, that was better than last time. At the end of the year, that first year I studied with him, 1946, I sent out about a hundred letters to try to—I received not one answer, applying for jobs. But I had to give him as a reference; who else could I give? And so I had to ask his permission to use his name . . . thinks I'm an idiot. He said, of course: You're the best student I ever had. I don't know if he ever changed that opinion.

I did hear once that—I won't mention the name of the person on the faculty at Chicago, who was not exactly a friend of mine but not an enemy at all, who I knew quite well. There was a discussion in the department about possible candidates for an opening in the department, which is the opening I'm sure that Joe filled. And Strauss had two lists. Now don't repeat this story, because I'll be accused of lying, but it's absolutely the truth. I think there were four or five names on each list. One list was theory; the other was practice, and the names on the two lists were completely different, with one exception. The number one name on both lists was mine. But I made sure that Joe got the appointment. So—

SG: How did you arrange for Joe to get the appointment?

HJ: I didn't arrange anything.

SG: How did you make sure that he got the appointment?

HJ: He knew what I thought, and he was very grateful to me for introducing Joe to him because Joe was very useful to him. Joe was a master, by the way. He's ten times better as a writer of the English language than I am. But you can't say that, because he disguises it behind that stiff formalism. But if you know his letters: I had a letter—this is important. After my mother died in 1983, I think it was, and Joe—of course . . . families were together all the time. Joe's father and mother were really out of the circuit that included Joe and me and my family. But he wrote me a condolence letter which—there's has never been such a letter since Lincoln wrote the letter to Ms. Bixby³⁵—just beau[tiful]—in which he referred to my mother as Aunt Frances. I never called my mother by her name, but he knew. I think he felt it more with my mother than he did with his own mother, who was a wonderful woman but she was an old world—you might say, she represented the Orthodox tradition in its nastiest.

And I have wartime letters from Joe. What do they call those letters? I can't think of the word. It was a letter from military transit. Anyway, his letters are all direct. The eulogy that I wrote ends by reciting a short story that Joe wrote for our English class as seniors in Lawrence High School, and I repeated it. It made such an impression on them, they've never forgotten it. So I ended with

³⁵ Letter of November 21, 1864 to a mother of five sons “who died gloriously in battle.” It was later revealed that Mrs. Bixby had lied: only two of her sons had died in the war. “Of the three survivors, one had deserted to the enemy, another may have done so, and the third was honorably discharged.” Michael Burlingame, “New Light on the Bixby Letter,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 16 (1995): 59-71, 61.

imitating Joe's voice telling this story: A rich little boy, the joyless quest for joy. Anyway, I'll let you read the story.

SG: So did you and Strauss discuss what topic you would write your dissertation on?

HJ: I don't think so.

SG: And he read the dissertation. Did he make comments?

HJ: No.

SG: No comments? [Laughs]

HJ: Well, I'd written the, I think, first four or five chapters. And Jacob Klein was on sabbatical that year—that's '48-'49. And he was giving a course at the New School on science and philosophy in seventeenth century. We never got to the seventeenth century; we never got past the sixteenth. And of course, I—Klein, by the way, is the person that Strauss really looked up to. The only one of his contemporaries that he did, and he always praised that Klein book on—

SG: On Greek mathematics.³⁶

HJ: That's right.

SG: By the way, the German conservative that you were referring to earlier was Carl Schmitt.

HJ: That's it. That's it.

SG: My mind blanked out for a minute, sorry. When you worked for Goldwater, did you discuss that with Strauss, your involvement in politics?

HJ: A little bit, to the extent that—I had a difference with my friend George Anastaplo,³⁷ who objected to Strauss being referred to as a conservative, and I'm thinking he certainly was a conservative. But when I was putting together a list of names, "Scholars for Goldwater," I called Strauss up on the phone and asked him if he would want to be put on. And he said yes. I'm not sure now exactly why he said yes [laughs], but he said yes. I put his name down on the list. Later I took it off the list because I thought it would jeopardize his being able to continue teaching at Chicago. So I—but he didn't hesitate.

It's the same Leo Strauss who was willing to be called a scholar for Goldwater wrote a letter to George Anastaplo after the Supreme Court had rejected his suit in a 5 to 4 decision with a ringing famous dissent by Hugo Black. And Strauss wrote: The people of the Illinois Bar, they

³⁶ Jacob Klein, *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra*, trans. Eva Brann (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968).

³⁷ George Anastaplo: see "People."

should come to you on bended knee and beg forgiveness. In both cases, it was almost instinctive loyalty to his students.

SG: You mentioned earlier that you think that he overestimated his students?

HJ: Yes. I took a couple of his classes, you know, at Chicago and at question periods and discussions I could see they didn't understand as much as Strauss thought they understood. He gave them a little too much credit. But also you might say the negative phenomena connected with Strauss's presence at Chicago was the fact that his elite students formed a kind of core elite in which they looked down on everybody outside of them. And Strauss didn't really know this, but it got him a bad reputation. Particularly—in fact, one of them, and I'm not sure which one, I think it was Dan Boorstin³⁸ who told me once that I was the only one of the Straussians whom he felt he could talk to because the others were so struck with their own superiority. Well, that's something that happens around every teacher who's regarded as great. His immediate disciples, like the twelve disciples around Jesus, they look down on everybody else.

SG: Did Strauss's students think of themselves as disciples?

HJ: Yes.

SG: Did Strauss know they thought of themselves as disciples?

HJ: I'm pretty sure he did.

SG: Do you think that that was something he thought was a positive development?

HJ: I thought he thought of it as a kind of a negative byproduct which he couldn't avoid. He certainly didn't present himself as a disciple of anybody else.

And I want to mention one good thing to say about Wilmoore Kendall,³⁹ and I've written about this in one of my books. Wilmoore Kendall, who had the worst reputation of any political science professor in the country but who worshipped Strauss. I think that Strauss would—if Kendall had lived long enough he would have become a good routine Straussian. But Kendall was the only American political scientist of his generation who paid any regard to Strauss. And do you know about the Yale professor, I don't know who it was, it was back in the '50s and this was repeated endlessly: There are only two kinds of people who should never be considered for tenure: Leninists and Straussians.

³⁸ Daniel Boorstin (d. 2004), American historian and professor at The University of Chicago. He served as Librarian of the U. S. Congress from 1975-87. Perhaps his most well-known book is *The Image* (1962).

³⁹ Willmoore Kendall: see "People."

SG: Oh, I believe that was said in response to the tenure decision on Tom Pangle.⁴⁰

HJ: Part of that controversy.

SG: Right.

HJ: I wrote a letter for—despite our differences, we have always been good friends. But he—well, that’s another whole story. That introduction that Pangle wrote, under Cropsey’s ministry, to the *Studies in Platonic Philosophy*,⁴¹ a posthumous book of Strauss’s, and the—do you know about Drury’s⁴² books, have you read them?

SG: I know about Shadia Drury. I have looked at her books; I haven’t read any of them through. I’ve got other things to do. I don’t think she’s worth paying much attention to.

HJ: You’re wrong about that. Because she went to Bloom’s lectures in Toronto, and she had a view that Strauss was really Nietzschean and Machiavellian—that originated as a Straussian origin. Pangle, when he gave the lecture here at Pi Sigma Alpha at a dinner banquet and he said Nietzsche and Machiavelli were the people for Strauss—that went to Drury. Drury, she didn’t invent this idea. This is the secret teaching of Leo Strauss which is concealed, not very well, but it is easily believed but it’s [what] people want to believe it about Strauss. But the origin—so I first got to know Drury when she had an article in *Political Theory*. I read it. It was signed as just S. B. Drury, so I had no idea that this was a female, by the way. So I just wrote a letter, saying that you show a sincere interest in reading Leo Strauss seriously, but you’ve got that wrong.⁴³

SG: So you wrote Shadia Drury and told her she’d gotten Strauss wrong?

HJ: Yes, and then she wrote back to me praising my reply to Pangle, which was published in the *Claremont Review of Books*. And it’s now chapter number 2 or 3 in the book that’s just been published. And she praised it to the sky: nobody had ever been as victorious as I had been in my contest with Pangle. And then she invited me to come give a lecture at—I forget the Canadian university she was at at the time. And she hated Pangle, not because he didn’t tell the truth but because he did tell the truth. But she just turned that into her book. Then she wrote a book on Kojève, which is just another book on Strauss. So I spent a weekend with her. She was a very good hostess. I couldn’t have been treated—I had dinner with her family and everything. She went on and on with anti-Strauss; she found out there was a big audience out there who wanted to applaud her, and so she’s made a career out of that. She spent a summer here in Claremont

⁴⁰ Thomas Pangle, Joe R. Long Chair in Democratic Studies, Department of Government and Co-Director, Jefferson Center, The University of Texas at Austin, studied with Strauss’s students Bloom, Cropsey, and Storing.

⁴¹ *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

⁴² Shadia Drury, Canada Research Chair in Social Justice at the University of Regina (Saskatchewan), author of *Leo Strauss and the American Right* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), and *The Political Ideas of Leo Strauss: Updated Version* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁴³ The conversation is interrupted by a phone call.

with her family but I didn't see her at all. But she's a—it's of some interest that she comes from a Coptic Christian background. She came from Egypt. She came to this country as a refugee from religious persecution. Now she's just a Barack Obama-type liberal, just repeating all those things that people want to cheer. It's a shame. She did have a lot of ability. And she sent some of her students here, and they were well trained. She did have a considerable accomplishment reading texts, except everything went down the drain when she found out that she could become famous by attacking Leo Strauss. Her last words on *me* when she was at an APSA meeting, how did she—she'd never wavered in her admiration for me, but I was a gentleman and not a philosopher. She taught me philosophy and then gentlemanship. She said that in an APSA meeting, and I haven't replied, but I'd say: Do you think Strauss thought that I was stupid? And I said stupid I ain't. So that's a short course on Drury.

Part 2

December 19, 2012

[The session begins with Jaffa looking for something.]

Harry Jaffa: I wrote a preface to the preface.

Stephen Gregory: That Strauss wrote a preface to the preface?

HJ: I did.

SG: You wrote a preface to the preface. I understand, okay.

HJ: It was particularly Straussian, so I thought. The essays—“What follows is intended to be the preface to a collection of essays entitled *Crisis Of the Strauss Divided: Essays on Leo Strauss and Straussianism, East and West*. The essays do not form chapters in the unified treatise or book of books—unified treatise or a book. They span almost forty years, and are presented chronologically, each representing an insight or point of view that seemed important at the time. Whatever ‘Leo Strauss for the ages’ [in quotes—HJ] the reader may distill from these pages, it will be his or her responsibility.”⁴⁴ [Laughs] Then I have an afterword in which I do exactly what I say nobody can do: I say Leo Strauss was the greatest mind in political philosophy in the last century and maybe of other centuries as well. But Strauss basically—he always puts a contradiction somewhere in any major thesis he espouses, somewhere else there will be a contradiction of it. He didn't want to be an authority to anybody that couldn't accept responsibility for thinking it out for themselves.

⁴⁴ Jaffa reads his Preface to *Crisis of the Strauss Divided*, xi.

I have a little paragraph in here on my—when I did an independent study with Eugene O’Neill, Jr. He was extremely kind to me and very generous, but he didn’t teach me anything. But a year, two years later, after I’d been studying with Strauss, there was a review of a new book on Plato’s *Republic* in *The New York Times* by Eugene O’Neill, Jr.,⁴⁵ and he got everything wrong. So I wrote him a long letter giving him the Straussian interpretation of the *Republic*, that it teaches us the difference between the desirable and the possible. And he never answered me. But the following January Strauss was already in Chicago, and I didn’t get a job in Chicago, so I was signing up to teach another course at the New School, and I met him [O’Neill] in the dean’s office and he greeted me very cordially, and I asked him why he didn’t answer my letter. He said: Because I didn’t have any answer. And I had hoped to see him again but a short time after that I saw in the morning newspaper that he committed suicide.

I should mention that when I was in New Haven, I had gone to the library and I looked up his doctorate dissertation, his Ph.D. in classics from Yale, and it was a metrical analysis of 500 lines in the *Odyssey* and 500 lines in the *Iliad*, and just grammatical technicality. I said, if he’d only had one course with Strauss, one lecture with Strauss he might have learned why the classics gives us reason to live, not to commit suicide. Those are my last words.

HJ: Did you read Garry Wills’ book on the Gettysburg Address?⁴⁶

SG: No, I haven’t.

HJ: Well, it’s not worth reading, I can assure you, only because it’s the one in which he quoted Wilmoore Kendall, who said that he considered the Gettysburg Address to be a giant fraud, and foisted on the American people an ideal of equality which they never entertained before. Everything in it was wrong. He’s another one of the really great frauds, ’cause he started out on the right.

SG: Right. As a Catholic. He started out as a Catholic. Identified as a Catholic intellectual.

HJ: I didn’t remember the Catholicism. He had had Kendall, I think, for a teacher at Yale, and he was—[William F.] Buckley was one of the people who patted him on the back. He’d written an essay on Calhoun which they—which was absolutely worthless.

[Jaffa answers a phone call and then leaves the room to look for a piece that he had written on Strauss.]

Here. “Nothing had prepared me for Leo Strauss. Unlike his students at Chicago, I encountered him unadorned by any distinction of position or place. Unlike [Arnold] Brecht, who was a tall, stately presence, he might have been modeled for Aristotle’s great-souled man. Strauss was a

⁴⁵ Eugene O’Neill, Jr. (d. 1950), classicist. At the time of his death he was teaching at The New School and at Fairleigh Dickenson College, and was a radio announcer in New York.

⁴⁶ Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words that Remade America* (Simon & Schuster, 2006).

physically insignificant, little man with a weak voice. His presence was as unimpressive as the dilapidated classrooms provided by the New School. But he was pure, overwhelming intellectual force. After a few minutes into one of his seminars, the little man became a giant. Every great book was a kind of Treasure Island, or more particularly a map of an island holding a treasure. But you had to decipher the map, and do the work of discovery, overcoming the obstacles by which great art, imitating nature, trains the mind to be worthy of the gift—be worthy of its gifts.” Let me read that sentence over. I condensed a world into it. “But you had to decipher the map and do the work of discovery overcoming the obstacles by which great art, imitating nature, trains the mind to be worthy of its gifts. One of Strauss’s secrets was that he made you feel not a passive receptacle of his insights, but as his partner in a voyage of discovery. He was the captain of the ship. But you were part of the crew. And you sailed together.” And . . . and I said, “Saul on the road to Damascus was not more stunned, no more transformed than I by my encounter with Strauss.”⁴⁷

SG: That was very beautifully said.

HJ: Okay.

SG: What year was that was that first encounter? What year? 19—?

HJ: That I met him? September of 1944.

HJ: Sailing together, I thought, was my great metaphor. You can take that with you.

SG: Oh. Thank you very much.

HJ: I wanted to give you a copy of my book but I don’t have any copies here.

SG: Oh. Well, this is wonderful. Thank you.

HJ: One thing I discussed there that as far as I know nobody else has paid any attention to whatever, and that is the difference between the opening lecture, the introductory lecture in ’49 and the book that was published in ’53. I think I told you he began in ’49 with quoting in Latin a medieval aphorism, “*solet Aristoteles quaerere pugnam*”: Aristotle is accustomed to seeking a fight. And he said: “I’ve been accused of the same thing.” I was glad to have a good model. But he said Aristotle was interested in the truth. Thrasymachus in the *Republic* accuses Socrates of seeking victory, and Socrates said: No, you have to seek victory in order to seek truth.

So. But well, anyway, when the book came out in 1953, the first words were the Declaration of Independence. And he quotes the Declaration and then he repeats the theme of the Declaration, but it’s in the Gettysburg Address now but there’s no quotation marks. In other words, Strauss gives the—he’s paraphrasing Lincoln as if it was settled doctrine. But the theme of the whole book is given in that introductory paragraph. He never returns to it, and there is no thematic

⁴⁷ Harry Jaffa, “Straussian Geography: A Memoir and Commentary,” in *Crisis of the Strauss Divided*, 8.

discussion that I know of, of the Declaration. He may quote it someplace else. But that has become my project.

SG: Did you and Professor Strauss ever discuss Lincoln?

HJ: Not really. Maybe only passing references. But I think that the decision that he made in his own mind was that this was my career, and he was certainly standing behind it but he didn't want his understanding to be interwoven in. In other words, we had our own separate identities. And he thought he could do me more good by shutting up about this.

SG: I understand.

HJ: But in repeating the words of the theme of the Declaration in Lincoln's words at Gettysburg without quotation marks, he was giving us his own opinion. And so the opening page of *Natural Right and History* is, the project is: Why have the American people forgotten their heritage in the Declaration? And he quotes a German author,⁴⁸ I don't know who that was, saying that fifty years ago the American people identified their regime with natural and divine right. Both Athens and Jerusalem were bound up in this project.

So the other Straussians . . . they don't like this and none of them have ever recognized it. But I haven't launched any attack on their work. I mean, a lot of it I—Goldwin's book on the Bill of Rights is a superb piece of Straussian scholarship, maybe one of the purest examples of it, really. He makes you feel that he is sitting right next to James Madison and they talked it over. George Anastaplo does the same thing with the Emancipation Proclamation, which I praise very highly.

SG: Do you think Strauss learned anything with his encounter with America? I mean, he came here as a European émigré. Was there anything about the American experience that changed him or that made him see things differently at all?

HJ: Yes, very, very much so.

SG: How?

HJ: One particular episode which I've recorded in that book is that sometime in the first year that I knew him, we were having a private conversation and he said that (I think it was his second trip here) that—I don't think that—he discovered his religion. I don't think it was true, but he believed it. In America, in polite conversation, you couldn't use the word atheist. He said when he discovered this, he knew he had come home. Those were his exact words. And this meant quite a change, because as he said in his 1960 Preface, that he identified liberalism, which meant good modernity, with the principles of '89. He hadn't yet . . . So this was a commitment really to the Founders' view of Locke, which was very different from his own view of Locke. But this is

⁴⁸ Ernst Troeltsch. See *Natural Right and History* (University of Chicago Press, 1953), 1-2.

what the Founders meant. So I've commented on that in this book. The Zuckerts⁴⁹ try to explain why so many of Strauss's students were preoccupied with American politics. Well, they're Americans. Strauss was a German who was no longer a German in his own mind and that's . . . Of course, America frowned on using the word atheist, as really it no longer existed, but that was because of their alienation from the principles of the Declaration.

I have another —this is the—[Jaffa shows something to Gregory]. You probably know this: Heinrich Meier's—⁵⁰

SG: Yes.

HJ: Do you know Heinrich Meier? Have you met him at all?

SG: Yes, I have.

HJ: I haven't. My impression is that he brings German scholarship to bear upon a transformed Leo Strauss. And he doesn't see this transformation.

SG: The transformation that occurred after his encounter with America?

HJ: Yes. I've got a long quotation in there from Lincoln—the speech he gave in July 1858 on the whole subject of citizenship. Most of those—the American citizens now were not descended from the original Founders, you see, and so they can't trace their way back by blood to their inheritance. But when they read that Declaration of Independence, it says that, then they know that they are blood of the blood and flesh of the flesh of the men who made the revolution. *And so they are.* That's Lincoln. That was Leo Strauss's naturalization process as described by Lincoln. But the—

Well, there are so many things we can talk about. What questions do you have?

SG: I have a few questions. I'm very interested in your remarks about his, Strauss's encounter with America. Do you think that in particular, that he was teaching American students made a difference for him in the understanding that he developed? If he had stayed in Europe and taught European students, would it have been any different for him? I mean, we think of him as, you know, first of all as a scholar, a thinker rooted in the classics. It's hard to see how the Americanness of what he encountered would be significant, but perhaps having a classroom of American students made a difference for him in some ways.

HJ: I don't know about American students, but—

SG: But America?

⁴⁹ Catherine H. and Michael P. Zuckert, *The Truth About Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy* (University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁵⁰ Heinrich Meier: see "People."

HJ: He had me, and he had Lincoln. Lincoln and Churchill were the people, and Bismarck.

SG: Bismarck, yes.

HJ: Throughout the nineteenth century, Lincoln was repeatedly compared to Bismarck because he presided over the unification of the country and he did it with blood and iron, not just with sweet words.

SG: Yesterday you talked about how Strauss may have over-valued, had too high of an opinion of his students?

HJ: I think so.

SG: In reading texts, one of the first things that come to mind is how tough-minded Strauss was. What Scoop Jackson commented on, that when you read his interpretation of texts, he's very tough-minded. He seemed to have been less so, you say, with regard to his students. Why do you think that was?

HJ: Well, I think that the split that came about between me and the eastern Straussians, including Joe Cropsey—he really became the sort of the presiding—he was the prime minister under Strauss's monarchy, you might say, in the classroom. And well, I think the underlying division really was with what they thought was where Strauss was going and what was the ultimate secret behind all the secrets of the secrets. For them, they began to interpret Plato as the precursor of Heidegger. It's the role of Heidegger. None of them ever said it. Well, Harvey Mansfield⁵¹ wrote a little piece once on Strauss and Heidegger—I've got it somewhere—where he in effect said or at least hinted that Strauss was a secret Heideggerian, and that was the ultimate secret.

And since Heidegger rules America today—he's the most powerful intellectual force in the world today and he is the ultimate interpreter now of liberalism. I forget what year it was that Hans Jonas⁵² came out here. He gave a lecture under the auspices of the theological seminary, which I, by the way, have renamed: The Claremont School of Theology, I call it the Marxist School of Demonology, 'cause I once was in a debate with the guy who was the dean over there in which he accused me of not honoring neo-Marxism. I said what the hell was the difference between the neo and without the neo. I said Marx was a Marxist metamorphosed among the real sophisticated into Heidegger.

Well, why was Hans Jonas invited out here? Because he had been the research assistant to Heidegger, which, I think—the extent to which Jonas remained a Heideggerian. He had, you know, a record: he fought in the British Legion during World War II, and without changing his

⁵¹ Harvey C. Mansfield: see "People."

⁵² Hans Jonas (d. 1993), professor of philosophy at the New School, 1955-76. In 1964 Jonas famously denounced Heidegger, with whom he had studied in Germany, for his attachment to the Nazi party. Among Jonas's most well-known works is *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

uniform joined the Israeli Army. So he had quite a record as a fighter for at least the independence of Jews. But at the end of his life, Strauss wouldn't—he heard that Jonas had visited Heidegger and after that he wouldn't have anything to do with him, although they'd been pretty close friends, as I recall.

SG: What you have referred to as the crisis of the Strauss divided, that was—during Strauss's lifetime, the disagreements were evident, I mean, I think before Strauss died. To your knowledge, did Strauss take notice of this or attempt to intervene or to respond to this controversy at all?

HJ: No. But his health was poor. And in his last years, he was more and more preoccupied with Socrates. You know, most of his books were about Socrates, his Xenophon books.

SG: Right, right.

HJ: And he also was going back to Nietzsche. He seemed to be going back to his German roots to some extent in his last years. Well, certainly he had a time when he was certainly a Nietzschean. I never did deny that.

SG: As a young man he said that he was.

HJ: So did hundreds of thousands of others.

SG: Yeah. You know, regarding the pugnacity of Strauss—that he mentioned in 1949 but did not—withdraw from the book in 1953. That was present in the '50s, certainly, and do you think he was well served by that pugnacity? Might, if you want to say Straussianism, might it have secured a firmer foothold in the academy if Strauss had been a little less—

HJ: Belligerent.

SG: in his attitude toward social science?

HJ: That would have been a betrayal of everything, really. He found himself like Horatius at the bridge holding the fort. Strauss was I think a unique figure in the last 200 years. I mean, there were other people, certainly. Go back 300 years: Rousseau was an extraordinary genius, which Strauss did not have that kind of genius, but he was right on the big issues and Rousseau was wrong, and there was nobody else to stand between them.

I published—it's the last chapter in the book that I just published; I put [in] Strauss's essay on relativism. I did that because I printed the correspondence with Isaiah Berlin, and Berlin complained that he had heard that Strauss had written a book about him and he'd been unable to find this book or any essay. So I printed the essay that Strauss *had* written, which was more on Marx and Freud than it was on Berlin, but I wanted to put that on the record. So no, I think that Strauss's coming to America was a way of waking him up as to the paradoxes of modernity.

After all, he came here; Hitler was in full bloom at that time and it looked as if Hitler was going to win the war, too.

SG: For a year or two.

HJ: Well, when I lecture on international relations I always—or really political science—I always begin by maintaining the thesis that in the spring of 1940, that if the war had been a chess game Hitler would have had all—

SG: Had all the pieces.

HJ: Right. And Churchill would have had none. I also in my book essays for Churchill,⁵³ I'm the first person who reprinted Strauss's eulogy of Churchill the day after Churchill died. I consider that eulogy to reveal Strauss's personal position, I think, more than any of his published writings. And it was a spontaneous; I'm sure that he hadn't written that out at all.

SG: You don't think he had it written out and brought it to class?

HJ: It's in the transcript. That's where I got it.

SG: But what I mean is, you don't think that he had written it out and came to class and read it as prepared text?

HJ: No. I don't think so. I'm pretty sure that he was much moved by the fact that Churchill had died. But what he says about our obligation as teachers to teach human greatness, that doesn't mean great books alone. Churchill was an example of greatness apart from, say, Plato or Aristotle.

By the way, one of the things that I feature in my introductions that I wrote to subsequent reprintings of *Crisis of a House of Divided* was the fact that the dispute between Lincoln and Douglas was exactly—and this is in my later book—was identical to the difference between Socrates and Thrasymachus. And the connection between the classics was absolutely direct, and not mere interpretation.

SG: It was in the nature of things.

HJ: Yeah.

SG: I understand.

HJ: At the heart of the American political experience is the heart of Plato's *Republic*.

⁵³ *Statesmanship: Essays in Honor of Sir Winston S. Churchill*, ed. Harry V. Jaffa (Carolina Academic Press, 1982).

SG: Do you think Strauss would have been comfortable with individuals referring to themselves as Straussian, and there being a school identified as Straussian that traces back to him? Do you think that he would have been comfortable with that, or pleased, or resigned?

HJ: Probably not. Something else I've written which is an unpublished manuscript. In 1996, it was, Charles Kesler had a conference here on the American regime.⁵⁴ I wrote a piece, it was about a hundred pages. I called it the "Decline and Fall of the American Idea." And among those who had put on the wrong side of the fence were the Straussians who interpreted the founding as a Hobbesian document masqueraded by Locke, and they all took their stand, by the way, from Strauss's chapter on Locke in *Natural Right and History*, the chapter which is hard to explain because it makes Locke the opponent of everything that we identified as good Americanism based on the Declaration of Independence, based in turn on Locke. And my reply to that criticism is that in *Natural Right and History* Strauss offers us an interpretation of Locke, not of George Washington or Thomas Jefferson—⁵⁵

SG: So. Strauss would not have been pleased there were a group called Straussian?

HJ: I know what I was going to tell you: that near the end of this little piece of mine, I had read a review by Harvey Mansfield, Jr. He used to call himself Junior. I don't know why he took the Junior off, because his father was a published author and you can't tell which is which. But for some reason or the other he dedicated one of his books to his father too. He was personally attached, but in other respects detached. Anyway, Harvey is an interesting case study of Straussianism, and he is a very clever guy and a very shrewd writer, and he can be both obscure and clear depending upon what he wants to be. Anyway, he was reviewing this book edited by the famous writer on the American founding at Harvard. Anyway, it was a collection of the documents dealing with the ratification of the Constitution between 1787-1789.⁵⁶ About two thousand pages of documents, and Harvey began by praising the book and saying what a wonderful level of discourse that it was, and too bad we don't have anything like that today. He didn't give any real account of what was in the substance of the book. But then he went on to—I don't know how he got on to the subject of the Declaration, but he spoke about the self-evident half-truth of the Declaration of Independence, which means no truth. It's not a half-truth, but it's still a truth. Worse than that, in the literature on the Declaration, the other people who rejected the Declaration, like Calhoun, rejected it because of the idea of racial equality, and Harvey certainly did not have any reservation as to the rights of Negroes; but that's what he said about

⁵⁴ The conference was the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Symposium of the Henry Salvatori Center for the Study of Individual Freedom in the Modern World, April 18-20, 1996. Charles Kesler is professor of government at Claremont-McKenna College and was director of the Salvatori Center at the time.

⁵⁵ The conversation is interrupted by a phone call.

⁵⁶ Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., "Returning to the Founders: the debate on the Constitution," *The New Criterion* 12 (1993): 48-54, a review of *The Debate on the Constitution: Federalist and Antifederalist Speeches, Articles, and Letters During the Struggle Over Ratification*, 2 vols., ed. Bernard Bailyn (NY: Library of America, 1993).

that. Anyway, [he] then went on to give pure eastern Straussian interpretation: Locke is just a—only Hobbes with a veil over him. Which means that—Walter Berns has also said that the beginning of the Declaration and the end contradict each other because the beginning is really Hobbes, and that means that there's no nobility in the idea of courage. And Harvey then later went on to write a whole book on manliness. Of course, the word manliness is only a translation of the word virtue. So anyway, I took the strongest possible exception. And then, later on when the conference—Harvey Jr. made a terrible, terrible personal attack on me before the audience, you see, without any explanation as to why. Just that the chap attacked everybody and he finally got around to me.

Well, since then I've written three open letters and I have a manuscript of a book with over two or three pages devoted to this dispute. I haven't decided yet if I want to publish it or not. But the most important feature of it is the discussion by Strauss and the reply to Kojève of the classic idea of friendship, [in] which Strauss describes how the philosophers have to have friends because they can't know what they're talking about unless they have something reflecting back to them. And so philosophic friends begin, in effect, to form a kind of club or class by themselves. But when the association of philosophers turns into—it becomes dogmatic and they just attack everybody outside and have internal dissonances. The Communist Party is a perfect example of what began as a philosophic friendship turned into a political party. So that whole process, there is about a page in which Strauss talks about—this is the only place that I know that he really describes the meaning of friendship in the highest sense, when he says that the philosopher, when he finds himself now inside of a sect, has got to leave the sect and has got to return to the marketplace. This is a political action. A political action, according to Strauss, is the foundation of the integrity of the classical idea of friendship, which I think is a complete vindication of everything that I've ever done.

And well, Harvey—you see, Harvey's father was my teacher at Yale. I think I told you that. And when I went to Columbus in the fall of 1951, Harvey I think was still a student at Harvard. But we got to know each other and he used to come to my office and we had long discussions. He was defending Talcott Parsons, his Harvard professor, against Strauss and it was very unequal conflict. I most often said that Harvey's conversion was—hard conversions make good principles. And later on, Harvey was teaching at Berkeley when Strauss was at Stanford, at the Behavioral Sciences Institute, and Strauss always had a weekly seminar. I don't think he could live without his seminar. It was like whiskey to an alcoholic. [Laughs] And I remember Harvey used to go over once a week from Berkeley to the seminar and he wrote me a letter in which he said that sitting across the table from Strauss he discovered for the first time what it meant to admire greatness from a distance, which was a beautiful phrase and Harvey's capable of that. Well, he's made several visits here since that episode and he always came over here and visited with my wife, which I really appreciated. [HJ shows SG photos of his wife.]

Anyway, Harvey wrote me a beautiful letter after she died and I believe it was an attempt to mend the fences that were broken down because of that eruption. It was a very unfair . . . of

him . . . It was a completely non-intellectual attack on me just because I was wrong because I attacked my friends. But what is the basis for friendship, then? I mean, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle, there's one book on justice and two books on friendship. So anyway, I've got a lot of other things to get. I don't know whether—but it's easy to see from that eruption on the floor of the conference, which was paralleled later on by the eruption of Tom Pangle telling me before 200 people that he had to pull rank on me. Twenty years my junior, he pulls rank on me. That Strauss confided in *him*. By the way, at that same banquet, Pangle went on—and this also reveals a great deal about eastern Straussiansm—that Socrates encouraged young men to become homosexuals as a way of—and this is the phrase he used—softening their souls for philosophy. And he gave a reference to the *Memorabilia*. The minute I got home, I dug out the *Memorabilia*. There was no such reference there. In that same introduction—but Joe . . . real philosophers. They patronize the morality because it protected *them*. But at the same time, they went on to enjoy the “quote the pleasures that were naturally sweet.” So they all—anyway, I don't know that Strauss ever—. Of course this was in a post-mortem publication. They were bandying what are the real secrets, you see, and certainly homosexuality was one of them.

SG: You say that Strauss's weekly seminar was like a drink for an alcoholic. What did teaching mean for Strauss in that way?

HJ: Life.

SG: It was life?

HJ: It was life, yes. Although there's something I wanted to tell you very much, you'll understand why. It has a personal reference. Where he lived in the Bronx, in Riverdale, when you got off the train you had to walk up a very steep hill to get to his house. And Strauss never took any exercise that he could avoid, but he couldn't drive a car either and he couldn't afford a taxi cab, so at least once and sometimes twice or even more, he had to go up and down that hill. But when he got to Chicago—that was the one bad thing when he got to Chicago: there was no built-in exercise and so he had a heart attack not long after he got there. The heart attack, I think, was 1953 or '54. And I always—are you a fan of the Marx Brothers at all?

SG: Well, they're very funny.

HJ: Yeah, well, okay. [Laughs] One of their early movies when Groucho was supposed to be the great African explorer and he—

SG: Coconuts.

HJ: Pardon me?

SG: Coconuts.

HJ: Yes, that's it. I was never sure what name to give it. And ten or fifteen minutes after the opening of the play or the production, Groucho makes his appearance. He comes in on a sedan chair carried by four Nubian slaves. [Laughs] This is the way that Leo Strauss would come to class if he could find the Nubian slaves. He wouldn't even walk across the Midway. And of course the principal function of any research assistant of Leo Strauss—no research assistant ever did any research—but you had to drive him and do all sorts of—be a kind of glorified Jeeves. So.⁵⁷

That was Bill Galston. He's the only Straussian or supposed Straussian who has an allegiance to the Democratic Party. And I think on the whole he probably tries to exert the same influence that most western Straussians do on our—well, I wrote an essay which is very important for political reasons as well as for philosophic reasons, I'm trying to think of—sometime in the mid-70s—and it was at some Washington meeting. It's called "False Prophets of Conservatism," and I began by saying that I thought that the salvation of Western civilization depended on the United States of America. I thought that the salvation of the United States of America depended on the Republican Party, and I thought that the Republican Party depended upon the conservative movement within it. And I showed how that conservative movement was completely false to its historical mission. And I began by using—I think because I have another contact, Russell Kirk, as the head of the paleo-cons and Irving Kristol as the head of the neo-cons, and they didn't like each other, I knew that, but mainly because Kristol was a Jew. But they agreed completely on the falsity and irrelevance of the Declaration of Independence. In this later essay, which I just gave you a copy of, I end it by—in a late publication of Kristol's, when he says the founding fathers were not much interested in the subject of religion and few of them wrote anything worth reading about it, particularly Jefferson, who never wrote anything worth reading about the Declaration of Independence or anything else. That absolute denunciation of the Declaration as having any—he's more Calhoun than Calhoun. So that is where the fate of the conservative movement has been heading. You can see in that "False Prophets." I say I wasn't trying to prophesy political history, but it is a prophecy of political.

SG: I have about two more questions, and I need to dash to the airport. Strauss could have stayed in Chicago in 1967 but he chose to retire and to move to Claremont. Why did he move to Claremont?

HJ: First of all, you should know that he came to *me* and asked *me* if I could arrange an appointment at Claremont for him. Now, in the actual work of doing it, Martin Diamond was my—he was still my friend and partner, and George Benson⁵⁸ was very helpful too. The Earhart Foundation was helpful. And Henry Salvatori, who ended up paying Strauss's salary. So of course we were delighted, and I remember it was Christmas week of 1967. I remember going to

⁵⁷ The conversation is interrupted by a phone call.

⁵⁸ George C. S. Benson, president of Claremont Men's College in 1967. When the college became co-ed in 1976, the name was changed to Claremont-McKenna College.

the train station. It was a whistle stop here. At that point, the Strausses, neither one of them had ever been on an airplane, I think. I'm not sure how he went to Israel. He must have gone by plane, but he really didn't trust anything to go off. He wanted to have his feet on the ground.

SG: So why did Strauss want to make the move from Chicago to Claremont?

HJ: I'm not really—we never really had a discussion of that. And I don't want to claim any credit for myself, more credit for myself than I—but I'd say I was probably the most important single reason. And later we had difficulty because Mrs. Strauss's stay in Claremont was on the whole not a happy one, not because of his arrangements at the college and his students and everything, which was perfect.

SG: And so Strauss arranged to move from here to St. John's?

HJ: Yes. Well, his friend Jacob Klein—

SG: Do you think that was the reason for the move, to be near Jacob Klein?

HJ: Well, Strauss was, you might say, a teacup in a storm. I think the decisions were all made by Mrs. Strauss.

SG: I see.

HJ: But it's also true that Mrs. Strauss was never fully domesticated to America. She wanted to be with people [with whom] she could talk German and there was a little German community at St. John's. So that added some—but as far as the old man was concerned, he was just as happy as he could be with all the arrangements that mostly I had made. And he knew the house and everything. He didn't like to pay attention to those things but somebody had to do it.

SG: Right, right. Did you consider Leo Strauss your friend?

HJ: My friend?

SG: Yeah.

HJ: Well, of course there's a question: What kinds of friendship are available to two people who, to me at least, see eye to eye? I looked up to him. He was as nearly as a god can be possible to somebody. I discovered by meeting with him was—the road on Damascus may be an imperfect analogy because there was no Jesus at the end. [Laughs] Nobody would accuse him of that. Yes, I thought that he was—

When he wrote that letter to me telling me that would accept the—that making his acceptance of the appointment conditional on their finding a job for me, that was about as personal as he every really got. But after all, when he told me that he discovered [that] in America you couldn't use the word atheist promiscuously: I don't know how many other people he made that same of

confidence. Strauss was funny. He talked about secrets all the time, but he never kept a secret. He was always full of secrets, you see. It added a certain charm to his conversation, and sometimes the secrets were quite remarkable.

But the relationship with Jerusalem and Athens, which was the dynamic heart of all causes for secrecy: that was—it was perfectly clear to me at least that the decision that he said everybody had to make was one that he never made.

SG: The decision between Jerusalem and Athens was the decision that he never made?

HJ: Yes.

SG: I see.

HJ: And that is the basis for interpreting the beginning of *The City and Man*, where he speaks about the crisis of the West. [Quoting]: And the only remedy for the crisis of the West is the teaching coming from the divine city of righteousness. He never named it. It certainly sounded a lot more like Jerusalem than Athens. But he once said to me something about—whether he actually said this or not, I'm not sure—but his head was in Athens but his heart was in Jerusalem.

SG: I understand. Perhaps we'd better end with that thought. Thank you very much.