Encountering the Abyss: Deconstructing the Political Philosophy of Leo Strauss and the Straussian Interventions Relating to the Invasion of Iraq

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AEI</td>
<td>American Enterprise Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>AVOT</td>
<td>Americans for Victory Over Terrorism</td>
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<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
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<td>DIA</td>
<td>Defense Intelligence Agency</td>
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<td>DoD</td>
<td>Department of Defense</td>
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<td>FBI</td>
<td>Federal Bureau of Investigation</td>
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<td>IAEA</td>
<td>International Atomic Energy Agency</td>
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<td>INC</td>
<td>Iraqi National Congress</td>
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<td>INR</td>
<td>Bureau of Intelligence and Research</td>
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<td>JINSA</td>
<td>Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs</td>
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<td>NESA</td>
<td>Near East and South Asian Affairs Group</td>
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<td>NSIC</td>
<td>National Strategy Information Centre</td>
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<td>NSS</td>
<td>National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2002</td>
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<td>OSP</td>
<td>Office of Special Plans</td>
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<td>PCEG</td>
<td>Policy Counterterrorism Evaluation Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>PNAC</td>
<td>Project for the New American Century</td>
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<td>WINEP</td>
<td>Washington Institute for Near East Policy</td>
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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the figure of an abyss residing at the heart of metaphysics, and argues that thinking in light of its destabilising connotations opens up the possibility of attempting to take responsibility for the violence immanent to any and all politico-philosophical positions. It argues that this abyss represents a void or lack always already underpinning the attempt to posit universal or essential premises, and that it is precisely this lack which may be mobilised to unsettle the totalising claims of ontology. It demonstrates that the abyss occupies a central space in the political philosophy of Leo Strauss and Jacques Derrida, positing that the attempt to secure against it, qua Strauss, precludes the possibility of gesturing towards the taking of responsibility for the violence inherent to politico-philosophical projects. It traces the ethico-political implications of this response through a series of interventions enacted by eight followers of Strauss surrounding the recent Bush administration in the spheres of intelligence production, think tanks, and the media in the context of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, arguing that this securitising logic reflects an ontological totalisation which underpins the totalising politics they propound. It then shows that operating in light of the implications of the abyss, following Derrida, creates a space within which the imposition of totalising ontological claims may be resisted. Mobilising a conceptualisation of 'Deconstruction and/as Resistance', it exposes three assumptions underpinning the Straussian response, the Schmittean friend/enemy binary, the notion of the 'regime', specifically in terms of the opposition of 'tyranny' and democracy residing at its core, and the concept of justice as amounting to the 'reason of the strongest'. It is the intention of this thesis to call for an endless resistance to the imposition of totalising narratives and principles in the hope that the violence of these may be subverted, and the violence which inheres in any and all projects be taken responsibility for.
Declaration

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Introduction

The influences and interventions which made possible the 2003 invasion of Iraq have prompted extensive interest and debate in the discipline of International Relations (IR) and beyond. During the years immediately preceding the US-led intervention, a wide variety of issues were invoked in order to demonstrate its necessity, perhaps foremost the 9/11 attacks and the question of weapons of mass destruction. It has been widely claimed that a deliberate conflation of these distinct matters was enacted in the service of realising this policy aim.¹ At the heart of this controversy is the unlikely figure of the political philosopher Leo Strauss; his thought, it has been argued, underpins the neoconservative movement which enjoyed considerable influence in the Bush administration, and pursued this agenda by means of such conflation.² This thesis explores the interventions of eight Straussians in this context, contributing to existing discussions in IR regarding how the invasion came about.

However, the approach this thesis takes differs significantly from other accounts of and challenges to the influence of Straussianism in the context of the invasion of Iraq. It explores Straussianism at the level of its theoretical foundations as a means by which to challenge it both conceptually and in terms of praxis, tracing the operation of three distinctive themes through the interventions enacted by these Straussians in the spheres of intelligence production, think tanks, and the media, and subsequently deconstructing them. A detailed and sustained exploration at the level of theory is vital if the interventions of the Straussians are to be more substantively critiqued; if their activities vis-a-vis Iraq are to be challenged, the bases upon which they were enacted must be understood.

¹ See, for instance, Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order (Cambridge; New York; Melbourne; Madrid; Cape Town; Singapore; Sao Paulo: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Richard A. Clarke, Against all Enemies: Inside America’s War on Terror (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney: The Free Press, 2004); Gary Dorrien, Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana (New York; London: Routledge, 2004); James Mann, The Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush’s War Cabinet (New York; Toronto; London; Dublin; Camberwell; New Delhi; Auckland; Rosebank: Penguin, 2004); Bob Woodward, Bush at War (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Singapore: Simon and Schuster, 2002).
² This neoconservative agenda is reflected in the 2002 National Security Strategy, which called for “direct and continuous action using all the elements of national and international power,” in order to destroy “terrorist organizations of global reach and any terrorist or state sponsor of terrorism which attempt to use or gain weapons of mass destruction...”. The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002, p. 6, available at http://www.global.security.org/military/library/policy/national/nss-020920.pdf.
Strauss, it will be argued, was profoundly affected by the destabilisation of ontology and metaphysics in the philosophy of Nietzsche and Heidegger, and his political thought can be read as a sustained attempt to intervene in order to protect society from the abyss of relativism with which it had been confronted following these challenges to orthodoxy. This figure of an abyss signifies the vacuum remaining once ontology and metaphysics have been shown to be without essential or stable ground or foundation. Heidegger explains:

The word for abyss — Abgrund — originally means the soil and ground towards which, because it is undermost, a thing tends downwards. But... we shall think of the Ab- as the complete absence of ground... The age for which the ground fails to come, hangs in the abyss.3

The political philosophy of Strauss is unique and captivating in this context insofar as it is dedicated to enacting a retreat from the abyss. In Larry George's words, Strauss' thought can be understood as “a lifelong crusade against ‘relativism’ [and] ‘historicism’,” comprised of “ontopolitical boundary policing, enforcement, [and] projection...”.4 This thesis will argue that Strauss’ project may be read as one of securitisation against the dangers of this abyssal condition, and that such a response amounts to an ontological totalisation of the sort Levinas refers to in his warning that “political totalitarianism rests on ontological totalitarianism.”5 It will be argued that the attempt to exert conceptual mastery which underpins Strauss’ thought is reflected in the interventions of those mobilising his ideas in the context of the invasion of Iraq; the totalising consequences of these interventions are, it will be shown, not unrelated to Strauss’ attempt to secure against the abyss.

This securitising imperative underpinning both Strauss’ thought and the Straussian interventions will be challenged through an alternative engagement with the abyss following the thought of Jacques Derrida. While Strauss’ retreat defaults on contending with, indeed is predicated upon exacerbating, the violence of totalising narratives which deny this condition of foundationlessness, a Derridean approach resists this by attempting to take responsibility for the violence immanent to any and all politico-philosophical commitments by exposing their contingency and partiality, and thereby provides terms within which the Straussian project of securitisation may be challenged. Derrida's thought aims to take responsibility for the condition that Being is not (benign): it is nothing in particular but whatever it is, it is violent. The thesis is thus of relevance to those in IR who contend with questions of ethics.

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and responsibility in a post-positivist context, and those interested in Derrida’s contention
that “nothing is more necessary than [the] wisdom” of “learning to live” (finally).  

**Strauss and International Relations**

Since the late 1980s, the thought of Leo Strauss has been the focus of scholarly attention
beyond the discipline of political philosophy within which he was situated. Some two decades
later, the prominence of Straussianism in the US, both in the academy and more popularly,
has increased; as William Connelly notes, “Straussianism is the only professorial movement
in the United States that has attained the standing of a public philosophy.” 7 While attention
was limited mainly to the US and Canada until the turn of the century, 8 in the post-9/11
security environment Straussianism has become an object of interest in Europe, Australasia,
and beyond, due in large part to controversies over their activities and influence in relation
to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. As Catherine Zuckert and Michael Zuckert attest, prior to this
period Strauss’ remit was modest: “When we studied with him, he was well known in a small
circle but largely unknown outside that circle.” Following 9/11, however, they continue, “he
was being pronounced the thinker behind ever-larger sets of political actors and policies, but
most especially he was being identified as ‘the brains’ behind George W. Bush and the Iraq
War.” 9 Nicholas Xenos elaborates:

> The onset of the US war on Iraq in the spring of 2003 brought with it a series of
> articles and radio discussions identifying a small group within and around George W.
> Bush’s administration that had played a central role in shaping its foreign policy on
> Iraq and with intellectual roots stretching back to the otherwise obscure political
> philosopher Leo Strauss. 10

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As Peter Minowitz similarly notes, Strauss’ “American disciples” began to be “blamed for manipulating the United States into a ‘preemptive’ invasion of a major Arab power.”

This interest is discernable in the attention the US media dedicated to the subject of Straussian influence within the Bush administration from 2003. Such was the public intrigue that a play portraying Strauss as “the guiding light of the neo-conservatives, who are forging America’s new foreign policy,” opened on November 15th, 2003, and was staged in Los Angeles, New York, London, Chicago and elsewhere. In addition, a three part BBC documentary was broadcast in the UK in 2004, which drew parallels between the rise of radical Islamic movements and Strauss-inspired neoconservatism. This focus on Strauss and the Straussians is reflected in the escalation of scholarly attention during this period, which resulted in the production of several noteworthy texts on the subject, as well as warranting a mention in several books dedicated more broadly to post-9/11 US foreign policy across a number of disciplines.

From 2004, a comparatively modest body of literature exploring the question of Straussian influence in the US foreign policy establishment emerged in IR. Jim George has applauded this engagement on the grounds that

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11 Peter Minowitz, *Straussophobia: Defending Leo Strauss and Straussians Against Shadia Drury and Other Accusers* (Lanham; Boulder; New York; Toronto; Plymouth: Roman and Littlefield, 2009), p. 1.
14 The play was entitled *Embedded*, and was written and directed by Tim Robbins. It featured parodies of members of Bush’s war cabinet chanting and proclaiming their allegiance to Strauss. See Minowitz, *Straussophobia*, p. 20.
15 The documentary, *The Power of Nightmares*, was written and directed by Adam Curtis and enjoyed a good deal of publicity, including a screening at the Cannes Film Festival in 2005.
16 For example Shadia B. Drury, *Leo Strauss and the American Right* (New York; St. Martin’s Press, 1999); Anne Norton, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2004); Xenos, *Cloaked in Virtue*; Zuckert and Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss*. While these are not specifically located in IR, they are nonetheless valuable sources and will be referred to throughout Part I.
17 For example Clarke, *Against all Enemies*; Dorrien, *Imperial Designs*; Mann, *The Rise of the Vulcans*; Woodward, *Bush at War*. Again, while not necessarily oriented in the discipline, these will be made use of in Part I.
this is a particularly fascinating issue... because Strauss is a much more interesting thinker than he initially appears to be and his political legacy a more potent and compelling factor than is generally realised in an IR context.19

Reflecting the engagements outside the discipline, in this body of work Strauss’ political legacy is deemed significant specifically in relation to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Patricia Owens, for instance, claims that through an exploration of Strauss’ thought it “is possible to understand the contentious political debates surrounding the invasion and occupation of Iraq.”20 George similarly states his intention to “explore elements of this ‘Straussian’ agenda... emphasising its significance for US and global politics in general and, in more specific terms, for the war in Iraq.”21 Part I of this thesis takes up and develops the question of Straussian influence and interventions in recent US foreign policy, offering a more extensive and detailed exploration than previous studies have provided, thereby contributing to IR’s understanding of the invasion of Iraq, and extending the possibilities for critique.

In conjunction with this focus on Iraq, recent contributions in the discipline have emphasised a connection between Straussian thought and the broader neoconservative movement in the US. According to Michael Williams, insufficient attention has been paid to exploring neoconservatism in IR:

analyses of neoconservatism as a theory of international Relations (IR) and of its relationship to contemporary IR theory are remarkably absent... IR theory has shown remarkably little willingness to engage with the neoconservative position at the level of its theoretical foundations.22

Such a theoretical exploration should, it is claimed, include a focus on Strauss; as George asserts, “neoconservatives have drawn from Strauss a thematic agenda of sorts...”23 Similarly, Owens emphasises the “need for further reflection on Strauss and the philosophical roots of neoconservative thought.”24 Williams seems to concur, claiming that “there is little doubt that Strauss’ thinking has been influential in many aspects of neoconservatism, and on the personal intellectual trajectory of key individuals.”25 However, he continues:

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Neoconservatism,” Review of International Studies, Vol. 33 (2007); George, “Leo Strauss’s Squid Ink.” As this list shows, all existing contributions to this topic in IR are either journal articles, book chapters, or form a small part of a broader study. This thesis addresses this by providing a more extensive and sustained engagement with Strauss and the Straussian in an IR context.

22 Williams, “What is the National Interest?” p. 308.
25 Williams, “What is the National Interest?” pp. 308-309.
it is equally important not to over-estimate the influence or the specificity of the Straussian position... [because] the roots of neoconservatism are broader than Straussian philosophy alone.”

That the intellectual roots of neoconservatism extend beyond Strauss is certainly the case. While an exploration of these and other features of contemporary neoconservative thought would certainly have purchase in IR, I would argue that there is a problem worthy of address in the propensity to render neoconservatism and Straussianism indistinct in the discipline. Such conceptual conjoining serves rhetorical purposes but risks overstating the scope of Straussian influence, leaving critics open to the charge of exaggeration and generalisation. In order to rectify this problem, this thesis focuses in detail on Strauss and a group of eight Straussians active in the fields of intelligence production, think tanks, and the media. The intention here is not to attribute the decision to invade Iraq solely to these Straussians, but rather to trace features of a distinctly Straussian inheritance made manifest in their interventions in these fields. Such a reading of the Straussian politico-philosophical project provides a stronger basis from which to challenge these activities.

In addition to this problem of conflating neoconservatism and Straussianism, the existing literature has insufficiency contended with the problems associated with employing the category ‘Straussian’. While existing studies make reference to ‘Straussians’, none has offered a justification for this signifier. Neither have they always been specific about precisely to whom it refers. Connolly, for instance, mentions three Straussians by name and asserts the existence of a group, but does not provide any grounds for inclusion in such a category. George provides a more extensive list, but does not defend his selection beyond asserting their “Straussian pedigree.” I would argue that designation of the signifier to particular individuals must be explored, not least because those seeking to defend Strauss and the Straussians frequently rely upon this lack of specificity as a means by which to undermine critique. Costopolous makes this problem explicit in his assertion that, in order to refer to a group of ‘Straussians’, one crucial question must be addressed:

26 Williams, “What is the National Interest?” pp. 308-309.
29 Such charges have been made in Zuckert and Zuckert, The Truth about Leo Strauss, and Minowitz, Straussophobia.
30 Connolly, Pluralism, p. 49.
31 George, “Leo Strauss, Neoconservatism and US Foreign Policy,” p. 183. While I would for the most part agree with those he identifies as Straussian, I would suggest that the selection must be justified and defended rather than simply asserted.
what are the intellectual commitments that ‘Straussians’ share?... This question is never asked and therefore never answered. Any serious effort to connect Leo Strauss and the ‘Straussians’ to the Bush administration must answer this question.”

This thesis will address this question, offering, in Part I, a thorough investigation of Strauss’ political philosophy, a detailed account of eight individuals who can, together, be referred to as ‘Straussian’ through a tracing of the specific intellectual commitments they inherited from their teacher, and finally a mapping of these concerns through a series of interventions surrounding the invasion of Iraq in the fields of intelligence production, think tanks, and the media. Such an undertaking positions critics of these interventions and of Strauss’ political philosophy in a strengthened situation by means of which to counter Strauss’ defenders’ charges that no such group exists, that critiques rely on an unspecified, general referent object, and that Strauss’ influence is not discernable in the activities of Straussians within and close to the Bush administration. It is thus useful in the context of IR if such interventions are to be understood in detail and challenged.

The value of such a theoretical exploration is emphasised by Owens in her claim that

is through understanding... [the theoretical] foundations that we can understand why neoconservative ideas became so popular in the United States after the 9/11 attacks and how they helped take the United States into the Iraq war.

In existing accounts, however, as well as conflating Straussianism with neoconservatism, such a theoretical exploration extends only to connecting certain of Strauss’ commitments to the conduct of ‘Straussians’ in recent US foreign policy decisions, most often his apparent advocacy of the use of deceit in the political establishment, understood in terms of the Platonic ‘Noble Lie’. However, this curtails the process of exploration prematurely insofar as it does not endeavour to tease out what may be at stake in Strauss’ thought. Consequently, this thesis enacts a series of deconstructive gestures following the thought of Jacques Derrida in order, on the one hand, to excavate something of what appears to preoccupy Strauss, and, on the other, to expose that upon which his project relies, such that it might be more substantively critiqued.

The deconstructive tradition, and the broader post-structuralist ethos with which it is associated, have been subject to a good deal of hostility. While not by any means mutually exclusive, such challenges frequently betray a dismissive sentiment as well as a more apprehensive or even fearful tone. The former is in evidence in, for instance, Stephen Walt’s assertion that

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post-modern approaches have yet to demonstrate much value for comprehending world politics; to date these works are mostly criticism and not much theory... In particular, issues of war and peace are too important for the field to be diverted into a prolix and self-indulgent discourse that is divorced from the real world.\textsuperscript{34}

Similarly, Chris Brown surmises that the “postmodern turn seems unlikely to provide new thinking on international justice.”\textsuperscript{35} More significant for the present purpose, however, is the sense of fear discernable in many responses. Robert Keohane, for example, objects “to the notion that we should happily accept the existence of multiple incommensurable epistemologies, each equally valid. Such a view seems to me to lead away from our knowledge of the external world, and ultimately to a sort of nihilism.”\textsuperscript{36} He continues:

I fear that many feminist theorists of international relations may follow the currently fashionable path of fragmenting epistemology, denying the possibility of social science. But I think this would be an intellectual and moral disaster... [because] ‘in a world of radical inequality, relativist resignation reinforces the status quo’.\textsuperscript{37}

This ‘fear’ appears to be related to the ‘intellectual and moral disaster’ that unsettling the possibility of epistemological points towards, i.e. to the accession of a ‘relativist’ ‘nihilism’. Such a fear is echoed by Ken Booth, who employs Richard A. Wilson’s analogy: “Rights without a metanarrative are like a car without seat-belts; on hitting the first bump with ontological implications, the passenger’s safety is jeopardised.”\textsuperscript{38} Here, the problematisation of ontology is noted for undermining the ‘safety’ of those wishing to engage in knowledge claims. In this account, while a fixed or stable set of ontological premises would serve to secure the subject, disrupting or undermining these renders him/her manifestly unsafe.\textsuperscript{39}

The fear associated with this lack of safety seems to be related to the possibility of knowledge and judgement: as Keohane notes elsewhere, post-structuralism “without praxis (or even with), advanced by legends in their own logogames, offers no escape from might is right.”\textsuperscript{40} Such a sentiment may be summarised in the words of a fellow graduate student of IR in my

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{39} An exploration of such designs to secure or render safe is developed in Part II.
  \item \textsuperscript{40} Ken Booth, “Security and Emancipation,” \textit{Review of International Studies}, Vol. 17 (1991), p.316. The notion of ‘might is right’ will feature significantly in Part II in an exploration of Strauss’ conceptualisation of justice as amounting to ‘the reason of the strongest’.
\end{itemize}
department: “I just want, no I need, no I want to be able to say that some things are just wrong.”

The deconstructive tradition can be said, then, to be feared in a manner not dissimilar to Strauss’s desire to secure against ontological and metaphysical destabilisation, insofar as it is thought to entail an immobilisation due to its engagement with the abyssal condition. Derrida’s thought in particular has, as Catherine Zuckert demonstrates, been charged with depriving his readers “of the capacity to think, much less act on their own behalf.” This means, she continues, that we “may be freed from complete domination, but we are not free to do much.” As Nicholas Rengger and Ben Thirkell-White put it, thought of this kind “cuts out the ground on which to stand in making a critique or looking for progress.” This concern with the implications and connotations of the abyssal condition entails that Derrida’s thought has unique purchase in exploring and challenging the Straussian response to the abyss.

**Confronting the Abyss**

The figure of an abyss plays a central role in this thesis. This abyss represents a void or lack always already underpinning metaphysical or ontological premises. It can be understood as relating closely to the concept of foundations or grounding: “Notice the etymological kinship between ‘Grund’ (‘ground’) and ‘Abgrund’ (‘abyss’).” The abyss signifies a destabilisation of the possibility of a foundation or basis which might serve as a platform from which to build; it connotes the absence of precisely such a ground upon which structures might be erected, a void or emptiness which precludes the possibility of a firm space from which to begin for such construction. In Allan Megill’s estimation, the abyss is “the metaphor of humanity

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41 There is, understandably, considerable fear relating to this disruption emanating from the locus of the production of knowledge about international politics.
stranded in a world without God or other absolutes on which we can depend.”45 Similarly, in Grace Jantzen’s words, the abyss signifies

the removal of guarantees of certainty or ontological foundations upon which truth, whether metaphysical, ethical, or political could be grounded, the end of a ‘metaphysics of presence’ as an anchor point for truth.46

The abyss represents the absence of universal, essential, or a priori premises which might serve to orient and locate knowledge, morality, or Being. Such a lack appears to preclude the possibility of a basis upon which to decide between competing ethico-political claims; if the grounding from which one might take one’s bearings and justify one’s preference has always already been destabilised, such positions are rendered contingent and partisan. The abyss, then, seems to connote a relativism due to the undermining of enduring standards and premises in light of which values and positions may be judged. Such relativism might suggest that “the abyss is a terrifying, awesome emptiness.”47 This is because, John Drabinski argues, it undermines that which had been taken to be universal or a priori standards, “leaving only the terror of the absolutely groundless and new.” He continues: “The collapse of what was foundational – the vanishing of all that might make life readily intelligible – changes everything.”48 The abyss signifies, then, the pulling of the carpet out from under the feet of the metaphysical tradition, rendering its claims to universality or absolutes indefensible, foundationless, groundless.

This abyssal condition is closely related to the concept of ‘aporia’. As Richard Beardsworth explains, “Aporia comes from the Greek aporos, which means ‘without passage’ or ‘without issue’. An aporia is something which is impracticable. A route which is impracticable is one that cannot be traversed, it is an uncrossable path. Without passage, not treadable.” In its earliest use, he continues,

aporia implied the suspension (epokhe) of judgment. At the point where the path of thinking stopped, judgement was suspended. This definition of aporia was inherited by the presocratic sophists who called an aporia two contradictory sayings of equal value. The suspension of judgement was a mode of perplexity before the inability to ground either saying, Plato's battle against the sophists was one against aporia; it is this battle that inform, indeed constitutes the history of philosophy.49

49 Richard Beardsworth, Derrida & the Political, (London; New York: Routledge), p. 32. That Plato is cited here as central to the struggle against the condition of aporia is significant. Strauss engages extensively with Plato, as Chapter One will explore, and it will be shown that Strauss may be read as continuing such a battle to offset what he understands to be the pernicious implications of this condition.
What is common to both the figure of the abyss and the condition of aporia is the undermining of the possibility of proceeding, of passing judgement, of relying upon a stable foundation upon which to base claims. Both destabilise and unsettle the path of thinking and knowing such that metaphysical knowledge is rendered highly problematic; they entail a collapse of the distinction between objective knowledge and contingent or subjective opinion. Similarly to the abyssal encounter, the experience of aporia may be described as an event that prevents a metaphysical discourse from fulfilling its promised unity... an untotalizable problem at the heart of the concept, disrupting its trajectory, emptying out its fullness, opening out its closure.50

This aporetic condition represents, like the abyss, that which renders impossible the conceptual mastery attempted by metaphysics. In Stephen Ross’ terms, “totalization can be effective only in the absence of aporia.”51 The figure of the abyss and the concept of aporia will thus be discussed in conjunction with each other in what follows.

Importantly, the figure of the abyss is not intended as an existing ‘thing’, nor an ordering principle, point of departure or substitute origin. Rather I invoke it here in order to signify the impossibility of any such origin. As Drabinski notes, the abyss cannot be read as any such substitute because “what is given to thought after the catastrophe of the tradition’s collapse is itself the erasure of any arch(a)ic sense of origin: the abyss. Indeed, the very phrase ‘abyssal origin’ collapses into itself.”52 The abyss is consequently not to be read as a substitute origin because it signifies the absence of any stable or prior point of reference from which claims might be made; it resists and unsettles any appeal to foundations, grounds or origins.

Tracing the Abyss: Nietzsche and Heidegger

An engagement with the abyss occupies a central place in the philosophy of both Leo Strauss and Jacques Derrida. This derives in large part from their mutual inheritance of the thought of Nietzsche and Heidegger. As Laurence Lampert notes, “Strauss said that Nietzsche ‘so dominated and charmed’ him between his twenty-second and thirtieth years that he literally

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52 Drabinski, “Beginning’s Abyss,” p. 143.
believed everything he understood,” while as Strauss himself states, Heidegger was “the only great thinker in our time.” Concurrently, as Michael Dillon notes, “the return of the ontological [began] with Nietzsche, [was] developed by Heidegger, [and was] exploited and contested... by Derrida.” Referring to Nietzsche and Heidegger, Derrida states:

the above are thinkers of the abyss (Abgrund), of chaos, of khaein – that is, where there is an opening, where the mouth gapes, and one does not know what to say, here there is an experience of chaos.

In order to explore the respective responses of Strauss and Derrida to the abyss, this heritage requires brief examination.

According to Dillon, the “twin political and philosophical crises that assailed European civilisation at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries,” involved, “amongst other influences... Nietzsche’s overturning of the metaphysical deceptions of onto-theology.” Nietzsche claimed that the metaphysical tradition had failed to question the status and foundations upon which ethico-political and knowledge claims are made. He argued that almost no philosopher since Socrates conceded the fundamental impossibility of the universal ethical premises; the latter “perceived the irrationality of the moral judgement.” Nietzsche argues that this drive to find a solid basis for moral claims has been almost universal since Plato, who “wished to prove to himself... that reason and instinct lead spontaneously to one goal, to the good, to ‘God’; and since Plato, all theologians and philosophers have followed the same path.” Such knowledge is impossible for Nietzsche for at least two interrelated reasons: the dichotomous mutual constitution of values and the necessarily value-laden nature of knowledge.

In the first case, Nietzsche rhetorically claimed: “in Europe people evidently know what Socrates thought he did not know, and what the famous serpent of old once promised to teach – they ‘know’ to-day what is good and evil.” Such knowledge of good and evil appeared to be possible on the basis of stable points of reference obtained through ontological laws, for instance Kant’s ‘Table of Categories.’ Nietzsche argues that Kant was

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59 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 60. Nietzsche’s reference to Socrates is significant here insofar as Strauss’ position derives from an engagement with Plato’s account. This will be explored in Chapter One.
60 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 68.
“proud of having discovered a new faculty in man, the faculty of synthetic judgement a priori. Then,” Nietzsche continues, “came the honeymoon of German philosophy,” in which philosophers went in search of such laws. The problem with this, Nietzsche argues, is that they “could not yet distinguish between ‘finding’ and ‘inventing’!”61 In particular, it may be the case that “the popular valuations and antitheses of value upon which metaphysicians have set their seal, are not perhaps merely superficial estimates, merely provisional perspectives...”. He continues:

It might even be possible that what constitutes the value of these good and respectable things, consists precisely in their being insidiously related, knotted, and crocheted to these evil and apparently opposed things – perhaps even in being essentially identical to them.62

For Nietzsche, then, far from being essential or absolute, values operate through dichotomous oppositions, meaning being generated through the play of antitheses. Good and evil can have no inherent meaning, only mutually constituted, contingent ones. As John Caputo notes, for “Nietzsche, the history of metaphysics... is inseparably a history of morals.”63 He explains that metaphysics means a faith in binary oppositions in which becoming is blunted by being, error by truth, time by eternity, body by soul, the sensible by the super-sensible. These oppositions are so many ways metaphysics has devised for itself to give us comfort, to soften and attenuate... Metaphysics exhibits the structure of ‘flight’... In the movement of its antithesis, its binary oppositions, we can see the direction of its flight: from the abyss, from the turmoil and the turbare, from everything dis-turbing and dis-ruptive.64

Nietzsche exposed precisely this attempt to order and secure.

Concurrently, Nietzsche argued that far from being simply objective, knowledge is inextricably bound up with value. European philosophers, he claimed, “pose as though their real opinions had been discovered and attained through the self-evolving of a cold, pure, divinely indifferent dialectic...”. He continues that far from this, they are “advocates who do not wish to be regarded as such, generally astute defenders, also, of their prejudices, which they dub ‘truths,’ - and very far away from having the courage to admit this...”.65 He surmises:

It has gradually become clear to me what every great philosophy up till now has consisted of – namely, the confession of its originator, and a species of involuntary and unconscious auto-biography; and moreover that the moral (or immoral) purpose

61 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 3.
62 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 2.
65 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 3.
in every philosophy has constituted the true vital germ out of which the entire plant has always grown.66

He concludes:

it is high time that we should understand that such judgements must be believed to be true... synthetic judgements a priori should not ‘be possible’ at all; we have no right to them; in our mouths they are nothing but false judgements.67

For Nietzsche, philosophy “always creates the world in its own image; it cannot do otherwise; philosophy is this tyrannical impulse itself, the most spiritual Will to Power, the will to ‘creation of the world,’ the will to the causa prima.”68 Thus knowledge is not objective or neutral but rather interest-driven: “behind all logic and its seeming sovereignty of movements, there are valuations, or to speak more plainly, physiological demands, for the maintenance of a definite mode of life.”69

Nietzsche’s challenge to metaphysics can be read as an exposure of the abyss which had always been lurking at its core. The impossibility of foundations upon which to base necessarily value-laden knowledge claims, and the dichotomous constitution of such claims, reflect a void or lack residing at the heart of metaphysics. In Caputo’s estimation, we thus find in Nietzsche “an experience of the abyss which undermines all metaphysical comfort, and a summons to the dance in which one comes to terms with the abyss and, in doing so, transgresses metaphysics.”70 In Nietzsche’s words, in this condition man

is a rope stretched between the animal and the Superman – a rope over an abyss. A dangerous crossing, a dangerous wayfaring, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous trembling and halting.71

As Drabinski summarises, the “gods have fled the tradition’s temple – or, perhaps better, have all been dissolved as illusions. After this collapse, this dissolution, we are left with the kind of consuming nothing captured in Nietzsche’s notion of abyss.”72

Nietzsche’s exposure of the abyss is central to Heidegger’s philosophy. As Dillon notes, the “one philosopher who has called metaphysics itself to account in the most profound of ways... is Martin Heidegger.”73 According to Megill, in “Heidegger’s universe,

66 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 4.
67 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, pp. 7-8.
68 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 6.
69 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, pp. 2-3.
70 Caputo, “Three Transgressions,” p. 68.
72 Drabinski, “Beginning’s Abyss,” p. 143.
73 Dillon, Politics of Security, p. 36.
there is a rift, a fissure, an abyss.”

Like Nietzsche, the abyss represents for Heidegger the absence of foundation or grounding for metaphysical claims:

The foundation is the soil for a putting down of roots and a bringing to a stand. The age in which the foundation is missing is suspended in the abyss. Supposing that for this time of distress a turning be still in store, that turning can only come about if the world veers from bottom to top, and this clearly means if it turns, starting from the abyss. In the age of the night of the world, the abyss of the world must be experienced and endured.

Heidegger thus pointed towards the foundationlessness of Western metaphysics through the figure of the abyss. As Zuckert notes, Heidegger pointed “out the unbridgeable cleft or abyss at the core of all intelligible existence.”

For Heidegger, the abyss is closely linked to the concept of aporia; as Ross notes “a sense of aporia can be found in Heidegger.” This sense of aporia resides at the core of Heidegger’s concept of Being, which “is actually constituted by, and continuously, therefore, exhibits, a complex and fundamental lack or absence.” In Heidegger’s words,

Being... is groundless. This seems to be a lack, though only if we calculate in terms of beings, and it appears as an abyss in which we founder without support in our restless pursuit of beings.

For Heidegger, the condition of aporia entails that Being itself is without foundation, predicated upon a void or lack as a consequence of which we cannot find our bearings. As he puts it, “the meaning of Being can never be contrasted with entities, or with Being as the ‘ground’ which gives entities support; for a ‘ground’ becomes accessible only as meaning, even if it is itself the abyss of meaninglessness.”

Richard Wolin notes that for Heidegger, radical isolation [is] experienced by Dasein: the abyss of ‘nothingness’ or existential contingency with which it finds itself confronted once it realizes that. Like Nietzsche’s conception of ‘truth,’ all traditional claims to meaning are little more than socially necessary illusion.

For Heidegger, then, the abyss or condition of aporia entails that Being must establish itself, must be the founder of its own meaning due to the fundamental lack which inheres within it.

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74 Megill, Prophets of Extremity, p. 143.
77 Ross, Metaphysical Aporia and Philosophical Heresy, p. 292.
78 Dillon, Politics of Security, p. 65.
and the absence of any external points of reference from which its bearings may be taken. For Nietzsche and Heidegger, then, the condition of aporia undermines the status of metaphysical and ontological presence, rendering knowledge, values and Being contingent and foundationless.

**Strauss' Response to the Abyss**

This condition explored by Nietzsche and Heidegger resides at the heart of Strauss’ political philosophy. According to Zuckert, “it was Nietzsche who had... a formative effect on the young Strauss.”

Similarly, in Steven Smith’s estimation, Strauss was so profoundly troubled by Heidegger that one could almost say that he “is the unnamed presence to whom or against whom all of Strauss’s writings are directed,” at least in part because, Strauss claims, Heidegger came to the conclusion that “ethics is impossible, and his whole being was permeated by the awareness that this fact opens up an abyss.”

Following Nietzsche and Heidegger, Strauss invokes the concept of the abyss. He claims that

> the reflective scientist discovers as the ground of his choice and his choice of science a groundless choice – an abyss... It means... that the choice of any of these presuppositions is groundless and leads us again to the abyss...

For Strauss, too, the abyss reflects a groundlessness, the absence of foundations upon which to build; he notes elsewhere that “progress has become a problem... progress has led us to the brink of an abyss.”

Strauss also deals with this encounter in terms of an aporia. On the subject of the possibility of moral judgements in political questions, he states:

> An *aporia* finds expression in this concealment: the threatened statement of the political makes necessary an evaluative statement on the political; yet at the same

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time insight into the essence of the political arouses doubt about all evaluative statements on the political.\textsuperscript{87}

Like the abyssal condition, as Smith notes, “the experience of aporia [is] where beliefs once held dogmatically or unreflectively are shown to be less than satisfactory.”\textsuperscript{88} This is the case, according to Strauss, in “aporetic dialogues,” such as Plato’s Republic; such dialogues are aporetic since they do “not answer the question with which they deal.”\textsuperscript{89} Smith reinforces this, stating that the “aporetic character of the Platonic dialogues must infuse our ability to interpret those dialogues.”\textsuperscript{90} The figure at the heart of many of these dialogues himself was aware of this; Strauss insists that Socrates “implied that ‘the universal doubt’ of all opinions would lead us, not into the heart of truth, but into a void.”\textsuperscript{91} This is because this void renders man unable to judge or conceptualise the good; for Strauss, man “cannot live without light, guidance, knowledge; only through knowledge of the good can he find the good that he needs.”\textsuperscript{92} For Strauss, this condition is one of relativism and terror because, in his words, “the Nothing... cannot arouse an enthusiastic and life-inspiring Yes.”\textsuperscript{93}

Part I of this thesis explores the Straussian response to this abyssal situation, introducing Strauss’ political philosophy and tracing the operation of his thought in the interventions of eight Straussian individuals active within and surrounding the Bush administration during the build up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Chapter One provides an account of Strauss’ thought. It will be shown that while Strauss concurred with the Nietzschean/Heideggerian diagnosis of the abyssal condition, his political philosophy was intended to secure against it by calling for the generation and dissemination of ‘socially salutary opinions’ by those in society capable of such self-creation, in the hope that these might masquerade as the foundations undermined by the abyss. Such opinion is vital, according to Strauss, insofar as it provides vital points of reference for society. In Nietzsche’s words,

\begin{quote}
The question is, how far an opinion is life-furthering, life-preserving, species preserving, perhaps species-rearing; and we are fundamentally inclined to maintain that the falsest opinions (to which the synthetic judgements a priori belong), are the most indispensible to us; that without a recognition of logical fictions, without a comparison of reality with the purely imagined world of the absolute and immutable, without a constant counterfeiting of the world by means of numbers, man could not
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[88] Smith, Reading Leo Strauss, p. 102.
\item[89] Strauss, The City and Man, p. 105.
\item[90] Smith, Reading Leo Strauss, p. 92.
\item[91] Strauss, Natural Right and History, p. 124.
\item[92] Strauss, Natural Right and History, p. 74.
\end{footnotes}
live – that the renunciation of false opinions would be a renunciation of life, a negation of life.\textsuperscript{94}

It is argued that Strauss took this concern very seriously, advocating the construction and circulation of such opinion which might function as a substitute for foundational premises which had been undermined. The chapter concludes that Strauss’ political philosophy can read as an attempt to securitise against the dangers perceived to be emanating from the abyss, to shore society up against the destabilisation of the premises which served as points of reference from which it might take its bearings. In other words, it can be seen as a project of securitisation via the imposition of totalising premises and narratives, the construction of ontology.

Chapter Two identifies eight Straussians who were particularly influential in post-9/11 US politics, and defends this selection, providing details of their interrelations, education, and publications. The argument made is that the signifier ‘Straussian’ can be employed in relation to these individuals, that these Straussians inherited the imperative to generate and disseminate opinion masquerading as truth from their teacher, and that this can be discerned in their interventions relating to the invasion of Iraq.

The final chapter of Part I traces these features of Straussianism through a series of interventions enacted by these eight Straussians in the fields of intelligence production, think tanks, and the media during the period leading up the invasion of Iraq. A convincing case has been made in recent years that the invasion of Iraq was a pre-existing policy for many in the Bush administration, and within Straussian circles in particular.\textsuperscript{95} The intention here is not simply to reaffirm this point but rather to elucidate the distinctively Straussian dimensions of the interventions of these eight individuals. It posits that these Straussians intervened in ways which directly reflect Strauss’ concerns and legacy.

Part I concludes by emphasising that Strauss’ political thought can be read as an imperative to secure society from the danger of relativism he saw as inevitably emanating from the abyss, that he sought to obscure the abyssal condition, to defend society against its pernicious implications, through a process of opinion construction. It reaffirms that the Straussian interventions reflect this securitising imperative of construction, and relates this

\textsuperscript{94} Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 3

\textsuperscript{95} The focus of Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, the Straussian credentials of whom will be explored below, on the question of Iraq appears to have begun as early as 1978. As Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Regional Programs, he drafted the ‘Limited Contingency Study’, a document setting out possible foreign policy options towards Iraq. See Mann, Rise of the Vulcans, pp. 79-80. This interest continued through the 1980s and 1990s, as the drafting of the ‘Defense Planning Guidance’ in 1992 demonstrates. For compelling accounts of Wolfowitz’s insistence during the days immediately following 9/11 on a connection between the attacks and Saddam Hussein’s Iraq see Clarke, Against All Enemies, pp. 30-34, Woodward, Bush at War, p. 61, and Gary Dorrien, “Benevolent Global Hegemony’: William Kristol and the Politics of American Empire,” Logos, 3.2, (Spring 2004), pp. 8-9.
to Michael Dillon’s exploration of the centrality of securitising endeavours to the modern philosophical epoch.

**Derrida’s Response to the Abyss**

Like Strauss, Derrida inherited a concern with the abyssal encounter from Nietzsche and Heidegger. According to Caputo, “Derrida appropriates Nietzsche's theory of fictions, and enlists it in a Heideggerian project of the deconstruction of the history of metaphysics...”96 He continues:

> Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida are ultimately united by an experience of the abyss: of what is variously called by Nietzsche, the tragic, by Heidegger, das Nichts, and by Derrida, the ebranler, the trembling... All three thinkers require a certain courage for anxiety, a readiness for the abyss, a capacity to face up to the groundless which does not attempt to arrest the play and bring it to a halt.97

A concern with the abyss thus resides at the core of Derrida’s thought. He emphasises the danger and trauma of this encounter: “the abyss occasions vertigo, which engulfs, in sum, the conceptual banks of... ‘clear-cut distinctions’.”98 Such a destabilisation entails, for Derrida, that metaphysics loses its grounding; “the whole constellation of metaphysical discourse is seen by Derrida as a contingent product of differance, a riot of Dionysian fictions, subject to endless differential shadings-off, slippages, disseminations.”99

As well as this focus on the abyss, Derrida frequently refers to the concept of aporia. Derrida connects these concepts when he explains that “there is only one aporia, only one potential aporetic that infinitely distributes itself,”100 and further elsewhere that an “aporia or abyss [is] opened up by the deconstructability of law.”101 Derrida explains his choice of this word as occurring “without really knowing where I was going, except that I knew what was going to be at stake in this word was the ‘not knowing where I was going’. It had to be a matter of,” he continues, “the nonpassage, or rather from the experience of the nonpassage,

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96 Caputo, “Three Transgressions,” p. 73.
the experience of what happens [se passe] and is fascinating [passionne] in this non passage, paralyzing us in this separation in a way that is not necessarily negative.” 102 Such an experience is, as Dillon comments, “a problem for which there is no resolution... from which there is no escape.” 103 What this means, in short, is that “politics cannot be oriented towards the good since there is no metric to provide the means that would serve this navigational purpose.” 104 Derrida comments that this site of aporia is one wherein “I have found myself, let us say, regularly tied up, indeed paralyzed.” 105 In Beardsworth’s estimation, “Derrida’s philosophy together with its political implications can best be articulated in the form of ‘aporetic thinking’.” 106

In Part II, the political thought of Derrida is mobilised in order to critique and destabilise the Straussian response to the abyss, offering an alternative gesture which resists the will to securitise. This is necessary because the securitising logic of the Straussian response precludes the possibility of attempting to take responsibility for the violence immanent to any and all politico-philosophical positions; the construction of opinion and its presentation as foundational, essential, or universal amounts to an indefensible ontological totalisation. Accordingly, the project of ontological totalisation via the construction and imposition of opinion, which resides at the core of the Straussian project of securitisation against the abyssal encounter, is challenged.

Chapter Four addresses the question of Derrida’s thought as politically poignant and effectual. Contrary to those, like Richard Rorty, who have claimed that “the Nietzsche-Heidegger-Derrida assault on metaphysics [should be viewed] as producing private satisfactions to people who are deeply involved with philosophy (and therefore, necessarily, with metaphysics) but not as politically consequential,” 107 it insists that Derrida intervened in politically significant ways. Although by no means an exhaustive survey of Derrida’s commitments, this serves to counter the notion that Derrida should be read as a- or non-political, thereby setting up the purchase his thought has in challenging the totalising politics of the Straussian response to the abyss.

However, taking seriously the implications of the abyss entails that Derrida’s alternative political prescriptions cannot in themselves be deemed inherently preferable because the standards by which one might make such a claim are necessarily indefensible.

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106 Beardsworth, *Derrida & the Political*, p. 31.
Leaving the argument at this stage would serve only to reaffirm the logic of an alternative, but no more defensible, set of opinions; it would fail to disrupt the metaphysical logos, which is vital if the imposition of ontology is to be resisted. The remainder of chapter Four is therefore dedicated to exploring Derrida’s political thought, specifically as regards the question of ontology, arguing that it is the way in which opinions are held itself which must be challenged if the totalising tendencies of ontology are to be unsettled. To that end, it develops a conceptualisation of ‘Deconstruction and/as Resistance’ through which the imposition of totalising opinions can be disrupted, showing that through this process a challenge to the Straussian interventions may be made.

Chapter Five mobilises this conception of deconstruction and/as resistance in the context of the Straussian project. It shows that far from the vantage point Strauss saw himself to have above a reliance on opinion, he was, rather, profoundly dependent on precisely such indefensible premises. It posits that the Straussian invocation of these contingent opinions as essential or foundational suggests that Straussianism may be read as project of securitisation, mitigating the implications of the abyssal encounter by relying upon such premises; ironically given Strauss’ position vis-a-vis the modern project, this situates him firmly within this philosophical epoch. It shows that in seeking to shore up against the abyssal encounter and exercise conceptual mastery over the condition of aporia, Strauss invites the ontological totalitarianism which underpins all other totalitarianisms and modern political philosophy.

However, if engaging with the abyss is the condition of possibility for taking responsibility for the violence inherent to any and all politico-philosophical projects, such a deconstruction must not end here; once such a process ends, resistance to the imposition of totalising narratives and premises ceases. Such unsettling must continue if the totalisation of ontology is to be resisted. Accordingly, Chapter Six will explore some of the possible ways in which the Derridean logic may itself be guilty of reliance upon foundational or a priori categories. The intention here is to ensure that, rather than attempting to tie together or draw to a close the deconstructive gesture, the chapter ends by extending and expanding the scope of this challenge beyond the realm of that which, as the thesis makes clear, I seek to critique, to include the philosophical position with which I most closely associate. It is through this gesture that ontology’s totalising tendencies may be resisted; it entails a restless and endless deconstructive challenge to any and all positions, those one supports as much as those which one rejects. There is, thus, an explicitly ethical concern residing at the heart of this thesis: while the abyss precludes the possibility of a series of universal or essential ethical premises, the argument here amounts to the claim that the violence of any and all such premises may be exposed, and responsibility for them aimed towards, by taking
seriously the abyssal encounter through an insistence upon an endless project of deconstruction and/as resistance.
Part I

Chapter One

The Political Philosophy of Leo Strauss

Introduction

Writing and teaching during the peak of mid-twentieth century positivism in the US academy, Leo Strauss’ preoccupation which the abyssal condition of philosophy predates the more recent engagement of post-positivist thinkers from the later part of the century. A German-Jewish political philosopher, Strauss migrated to the US in 1937, becoming a member of the University in Exile at the New School for Social Research in 1938 before joining the University of Chicago in 1949, where he spent the majority of his working life until his retirement in 1967. During his life Strauss published fourteen books and numerous essays and articles, most focusing explicitly on ancient and modern political philosophy, in particular on the thought of Plato, Xenophon, Al Farabi, Maimonides, Spinoza, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. The following will explore his political philosophy with a view to demonstrating the centrality of the concept of the abyss within it, arguing that it may be read as a project of securitisation against the dangers Strauss perceived as immanent to it.

The Crisis of the West: Exposing the Abyss in Society, Social Science, and Philosophy

The exposure of the abyss residing at the heart of metaphysics relates, for Strauss, to what he perceived to be the ‘Crisis of the West’. Following Nietzsche, Strauss diagnosed that the West

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had been plunged into a crisis so severe that not only its prosperity and influence but also its very survival were at stake. One dimension of this crisis related to the Cold War. Writing in 1964, Strauss claimed that “today, so far from ruling the globe, the West’s very survival is endangered by the East as it has not been since the beginning,” threatened “by the victory of the most extreme form of Eastern despotism.”

However, the confrontation with the Soviet Union was in itself not, according to Strauss, sufficient to indicate crisis: “even the destruction of the West would not necessarily prove that the West is in a crisis: the West could go down in honor, certain of its purpose.” The crisis of the West stems, for Strauss, more accurately from “the West’s having become uncertain of its purpose.” He explains:

The West was once certain of its purpose – of a purpose in which all men could be united, and hence it had a clear vision of its future and the future of mankind. We do no longer have that certainty and that clarity. Some among us even despair of the future, and this despair explains many forms of contemporary Western degradation.

As Minowitz suggests, in his account of the crisis, “Strauss seems to be addressing ideas and values rather than institutions or policies.” The crisis of the West was, for Strauss, the consequence of a loss of direction and raison d’etre; the danger posed by Soviet communism related not to the confrontation itself but rather consisted in a loss of purpose on the part of the West. He explains that this sense of purpose is related to questions of progress and prosperity; the West had once seen itself as an agent of these, believing that, through its leadership,

progress toward ever greater prosperity would... become, or render possible, the progress toward ever greater freedom and justice. This progress would necessarily be the progress toward a society embracing equally all human beings: a universal league of free and equal nations, each nation consisting of free and equal men and women.

Accompanying this progression towards freedom and equality would necessarily be the spread of democracy across the globe; it was believed that “to make the world safe for the Western democracies, one must make the whole globe democratic, each country in itself as well as the society of nations.” Strauss claims that this movement, consisting of the spreading of Western values and practices abroad, in effect global Westernisation, was thought to be guaranteed “by the rationality, the universal validity, of the goal;” it was thought to be a movement “of the large majority of men on behalf of the large majority of men,” meaning that few would be inclined to oppose it. In Zuckert and Zuckert’s estimation, “[t]he West had believed in a progressive future, built upon the conquest of nature made

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2 Strauss, The City and Man, p. 3.
3 Strauss, The City and Man, p. 3.
4 Minowitz, Straussophobia, p. 276.
5 Strauss, The City and Man, p. 4.
6 Strauss, The City and Man, p. 4.
7 Strauss, The City and Man, p. 4.
possible by modern natural science, and in the coming of egalitarian and just political regimes made possible by modern political philosophy,” in short a “Wilsonian mission.” However, such a mission was not, according to Strauss, realised; instead crisis ensued.

This crisis could, Strauss asserted, be perceived in at least three interrelated contexts: political society, social science, and philosophy. To take the first case, the crisis of the West was made manifest for Strauss in what he perceived to be the watering down of culture and the disintegration of conventional social mores. The democratisation of the globe in the image of the West was supposed to resemble “an aristocracy which has broadened into a universal aristocracy.” In other words, it was believed that democracy is the regime that stands or falls by virtue: a democracy is a regime in which all or most adults are men of virtue, and since virtue seems to require wisdom, a regime in which all or most adults are virtuous and wise, or the society in which all or most adults have developed their reason to a high degree, or the rational society.

This makes clear that Strauss understood democracy as being intended to entail the rule of the culturally superior and highly developed masses, who would be worthy and capable of ruling wisely and justly. Following Nietzsche, Strauss argued that far from this, modern democracy had come to more closely resemble the rule of “mass culture,” a culture which “can be appropriated by the meanest capacities without any moral or intellectual effort whatsoever and at a very low monetary price.” This vision of mass democracy entails an absence of “human greatness” according to Strauss; the pursuit of knowledge and a concurrent striving for virtue and wisdom has been replaced by the prevalence of citizens who “read nothing but the sports pages and the comic section,” a culture reliant on “singing commercials.” Strauss was deeply concerned about the ways in which cultural notions of value and virtue have become diluted in modern democratic society: “Culture is now no longer, as people say, an absolute, but has become relative... culture is any pattern of conduct common to any human group.” This signalled, for Strauss, that social value and cultural meaning had been undermined to the extent that any conception is as choice-worthy as any other; culture and value have become entirely relative concepts, in line with the loss of purpose and consequent decline of the West. As he puts it, if we contrast the present-day usage of “culture” with the original meaning, it is as if someone would say that the cultivation of a garden may consist of the garden’s being littered with empty tin cans and whiskey bottles and used papers of various

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10 Strauss, Liberalism Ancient and Modern, p. 4.
11 Strauss, Liberalism Ancient and Modern, p. 4.
12 Strauss, Liberalism Ancient and Modern, p. 5.
13 Strauss, Liberalism Ancient and Modern, p. 4.
descriptions thrown around the garden at random. Having arrived at this point, we realize that we have lost our way somehow.\textsuperscript{14}

By this, Strauss seems to suggest that defining culture to include any and all patterns of human behaviour entails the loss of any sense of aspiration to the extraordinary; if the unkempt and neglected garden is to be deemed of equal value to one carefully crafted and well maintained, culture cannot but descend into a state of decline towards mediocrity and relativism.

This manifestation of crisis in society and culture is reflective, according to Strauss, of a parallel crisis in social science. For Strauss, the development of modern political science, in particular its Positivist branch, can be seen as closely related to the loss of value and purpose in the broader context of the West. It is with the attempt to separate ‘fact’ and ‘value’ in modern social science that Strauss primarily takes issue. He asserts:

Social science positivism reached its final form by realizing or decreeing that there is a fundamental difference between facts and values, and that only factual judgements are within the competence of science: scientific social science is incompetent to pronounce value judgements, and must avoid value judgements altogether. As for the meaning of the term “value” in statements of this kind, we can hardly say more than that “values” mean both things preferred and principles of preference.\textsuperscript{15}

Strauss thus attributes to modern social scientists the belief that “the conflicts between values or value-systems are essentially insoluble for human reason,”\textsuperscript{16} and cites this as a principal cause of their desire to separate fact and value. As more broadly in Western society, the notion of value in social science came to be seen as relative; it became impossible for a particular value to be deemed superior to or more choice-worthy than any other, and this led social scientists to the conclusion that value is an inappropriate object of study. In other words, viewing values as relative entailed their ejection from the field of social scientific scholarship precisely because there can be no way to justify a preference for one particular value over another in scientific terms.

Strauss believed that such a separation, the claim to conduct a value-free social or political science, is necessarily a flawed endeavour from the outset because “generally speaking, it is impossible to understand thought or action or work without evaluating it.”\textsuperscript{17} The attachment of the social scientist to the pursuit of truth, for instance, is, according to Strauss, an indication of his implicit value judgements; even if it is the only value to which he is committed, the social scientist is dedicated to the value of pursuing truth, a value which he

\textsuperscript{14} Strauss, \textit{Liberalism Ancient and Modern}, p. 4.


\textsuperscript{16} Strauss, \textit{What is Political Philosophy?}, p. 22.

\textsuperscript{17} Strauss, \textit{What is Political Philosophy?}, p. 21.
cannot by his own standards claim is superior to any alternative.\footnote{For further discussion on this point see pp. 9–27 of Strauss’ What is Political Philosophy?} He further argues that “it is impossible to study social phenomena, i.e., all important social phenomena without making value judgements,”\footnote{Strauss, What is Political Philosophy?, p. 21.} and takes this to indicate that, for all protestations to the contrary, modern social scientists operate as much from implicit value judgements as any philosopher or pre-modern theorist. In Strauss’ words,

> the value judgements which are forbidden to enter through the front door of political science, sociology or economics, enter these disciplines through the back door... We must not overlook the invisible value judgements which are concealed from undiscerning eyes but nevertheless most powerfully present in allegedly purely descriptive concepts.\footnote{Strauss, What is Political Philosophy?, p. 21.}

As he succinctly puts it, “are not all factual assertions based on conditions, or assumptions, which however do not become questionable as long as we deal with facts qua facts?”\footnote{Strauss, What is Political Philosophy?, p. 22.}

Further to this indictment, Strauss also criticises modern social science for attempting to infer general claims about the nature of the human condition or social interaction from specific assertions about particular contextually located phenomena. Strauss suggests that by attempting to orient their field and type of scholarship within the tradition of the natural sciences, modern social scientists are “in danger of mistaking particularities of, say, mid-twentieth United States, or more generally of modern western society, for the essential character of human society.”\footnote{Strauss, What is Political Philosophy?, p. 25.} In an attempt to rectify this propensity to infer the general from the context-specific, Strauss argues that social scientists have attempted to engage in “cross-cultural research.” However, this only exacerbates the problem because such scholarship

> misses the meaning of those other cultures, because it interprets them through a conceptual scheme which originates in modern western society, which reflects that particular society, and which fits at best only that particular society.\footnote{Strauss, What is Political Philosophy?, p. 25.}

In short, Strauss believes that such an attempt to understand cultures other than one’s own is impossible if the conceptual framework from which the social scientist begins is a product of and fundamentally located within his own culture, which it inevitably is.\footnote{There is a notable tension here between what Strauss claims about the dilution and of culture into a relative and inferior state and the impossibility of understanding one culture from the vantage point of another: while he claims that culture has become a relative concept which applies to almost any pattern of collective human behaviour, thus making a judgment about the condition of certain contemporary cultures, he subsequently claims that it is impossible to judge one culture from the values and concepts of another. It is thus inconsistent for him to assert such a judgement about contemporary culture unless he is speaking only of his own culture, which seems not to be the case as he is referring at least to the whole of the Western world.}

\footnote{In other words,}
Strauss suggests that the subject and object of study are not distinct but, rather, collapse into each other in the practice of positivist social science. What is deemed a valid question of study in the first instance, the original questions and motivations of inquiry, the methodological and strategic choices of research, and the answers which are arrived at all depend, for Strauss, on the framework and assumptions of the social scientist. In his words:

questions depend on one’s direction of interest, and hence on one’s values, i.e., on subjective principles. Now it is the direction of interests, and not logic, which supplies the fundamental concepts. It is therefore not possible to divorce from each other the subjective and objective elements of social science: the objective answers receive their meaning from the subjective questions... As a consequence, modern science comes to be viewed as one historically relative way of understanding things which is not in principle superior to alternative ways of understanding.\(^{25}\)

The attempt to evacuate value from the study of social phenomena is related, Strauss claims, to a crisis in Western philosophy.

According to Minowitz, for Strauss philosophy should be understood as “a quest for the standards or goals that should guide human life.”\(^ {26}\) The crisis of philosophy was therefore related to a crisis of the fundamental principles, values, or mores from which the good might be inferred. Strauss traces the roots of this philosophical crisis to the origins of what he sees as the modern philosophical project. According to Charles Larmore, “[m]odern thought seemed to Strauss morally disastrous from beginning to end.”\(^ {27}\) Similarly, Zuckert and Zuckert assert that he held “the firm conviction that modernity (in philosophy and politics) might have been a mistake...”\(^ {28}\) Strauss posits that the “founder of modern political philosophy was Machiavelli.”\(^ {29}\) He claimed to have “discovered a new moral continent,” Strauss argues, “based on a critique of religion and a critique of morality.”\(^ {30}\) This new, modern political philosophy represented a fundamental break with earlier thought and practice; according to Strauss, he “was the first in a long series of modern thinkers who hoped to bring about the establishment of new modes and orders by means of enlightenment. The Enlightenment... begins with Machiavelli.”\(^ {31}\)

Strauss argues that for Machiavelli, “there is something fundamentally wrong with an approach to politics which culminates in a utopia, in a description of a best regime whose actualization is highly improbable.” This entails that we should “cease to take our bearings by virtue, the highest objective which a society might choose; let us begin to take our bearings

\(^{26}\) Minowitz, *Straussophobia*, p. 274.  
\(^{28}\) Zuckert and Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss*, p. 65.  
\(^{29}\) Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?*, p. 40.  
\(^{30}\) Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?*, pp. 40-41.  
\(^{31}\) Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?*, p. 46.
from the objectives which are actually pursued by all societies.” In other words, Strauss posits that Machiavelli engendered a fundamental alteration of the standards by which society could be judged, and from which the goals of political philosophy could be established; Machiavelli orchestrated a shift from virtue as the ultimate guiding principle to more easily attainable goals. In short, he “consciously lowers the standards of social action.” This ‘lowering of standards’ refers to the notion individuals and societies should “take their bearings from what was common rather than what was exceptional in human beings[...]. Modern philosophy was a result of a choice to pursue lower goals that were more likely to be achieved...” In substantive terms, he continues, this entails that “one cannot define the good of society, the common good, in terms of virtue, but one must define virtue in terms of the common good.” The common good, he explains, is established by observing “the objectives actually pursued by all societies. These objectives are: freedom from foreign domination, stability or rule of law, prosperity, glory or empire.” It is these objectives, in the modern project, he concludes, that define virtue; “virtue is nothing but civic virtue, patriotism or devotion to collective selfishness.” In lowering these standards, in short, Machiavelli undermined the possibility of aspiring to a stable conception of virtue, favouring instead the pursuit of the good which simply reflected particular, existing states of affair. Citing Strauss, Minowitz concludes from this that on account of “his path-breaking abandonment of ‘fixed ends,’ Machiavelli renders man ‘as it were infinitely malleable’.” In other words, any sense of man’s immanent nature or the essential goals of life was undermined by the modern unsettling of the previously unquestioned ends of man.

Just as the social and political projects of modernity had presumed desirable outcomes such as the spread of democracy and prosperity, the concurrent philosophical endeavours assumed the triumph of reason through the removal of religion and superstition. This critique had at its core what Strauss termed an ‘anti-theological ire’; as Zuckert notes, modern philosophers “saw widespread belief in a Creator God as the obstacle to the human attainment of knowledge... Biblical religion was fundamentally irrational.” Religion was undermined, Strauss argued, by the moderns’ subjecting of revelation to reason; as Zuckert explains, they “insisted that nothing should be held to be true that could not be shown to be in accord with reason.” Strauss claims that “the narrowing of the horizon which Machiavelli

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32 Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?*, p. 41.
33 Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?*, p. 41.
34 Zuckert, *Postmodern Plato*, p. 119.
35 Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?*, p. 42.
was the first to effect, was caused, or at least facilitated, by anti-theological ire – a passion which we can understand but of which we cannot approve.”

He thus made it plain that he understands the evacuation of religion from social life to be problematic. The modern project also undermined traditional moral beliefs, subjecting them to rational scrutiny and showing them to be based simply on convention.

However, rather than the liberating and enlightening consequences envisioned by these philosophers, for Strauss the consequences of the removal of religious convictions and traditional values were pernicious. What they exposed, Strauss asserts, is that “the good life does not consist, as it did according to the earlier notion, in compliance with a pattern antedating the human will, but consists primarily in originating the pattern itself.”

In other words, what these philosophers exposed is that in the absence of religious or traditional beliefs, man has no point of reference from which to navigate the world or conceptualise the good; man has to be the origin of such values and beliefs; “man’s very humanity is acquired.”

This means that the meaningfulness of life must be created by man; all external points of reference have been dismantled and rejected. The consequence of this is the exposure of man’s lack of essence, life’s lack of inherent meaning, in short a space wherein no ends are inherently superior to any other. In Strauss’ terms, in

Machiavelli’s teaching we have the first example of a spectacle which has renewed itself in almost every generation since. A fearless thinker seems to have opened up a depth from which the classics, in their noble simplicity, recoiled.

It may be claimed, then, that the modern project unwittingly exposed a ‘depth’ by undermining the only possible points of reference from which man can infer the good, thereby placing the responsibility on man for the creation of the good; alternatively put, by undermining religion and tradition, the moderns exposed the abyss.

According to Strauss, Machiavelli’s initial exposure of the abyss was developed and exacerbated by Nietzsche. Nietzsche’s challenge to the Western philosophical tradition is of vital importance for Strauss; Zuckert and Zuckert cite him as stating that “the critique of modern rationalism or the modern belief in reason by Nietzsche cannot be dismissed or forgotten.’ The Nietzschean critique is, he says, the ultimate ground of the ‘crisis of our time’.”

While, as Minowitz notes, Strauss departed from Nietzsche in his response to the crisis, it seems to be the case that their respective diagnoses of it converge in many senses;

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39 Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?,* p. 44.
42 Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?,* p. 43.
while Strauss, in contrast to Nietzsche, “worked assiduously to recover and defend premodern rationalism,” the former relied on Nietzsche insofar as he “traced ‘the crisis of liberal democracy’ to Nietzsche’s ‘critique of modern rationalism’.”

Strauss was deeply troubled by the challenges posed to the Western philosophical tradition by what he termed ‘radical historicist’ and ‘existentialist’ thought, the main architects of which were Nietzsche and Heidegger respectively. To take radical historicism first, Strauss was concerned about the moral relativism it seemed to point towards. Historicism, he argued, was based on the premise that:

All understanding, all knowledge, however limited and ‘scientific,’ presupposes a frame of reference; it presupposes a horizon, a comprehensive view within which understanding and knowing take place. Only such a comprehensive vision makes possible any seeing, any observation, any orientation. The comprehensive view of the whole cannot be validated by reasoning, since it is the basis of all reasoning. Accordingly, there is a variety of such comprehensive views, each as legitimate as any other: we have to choose such a view without any rational guidance... Our choice has no support but itself.

According to Strauss the historicist view entails that because our views and beliefs are necessarily bound up in our historical circumstances and worldview, we have no basis upon which to decide between competing values; our historical context delimits and directs how we can and do see the world, which means we have no external or objective vantage point from which to have knowledge of an essential good. This would seem to imply that we ought to engage in the study of the contextually and historically specific, rather than aiming for knowledge of the ‘whole’, of natural or eternally true values. This too, however, would inevitably be problematic according to Strauss. With historicism’s successful attack on all attempts to universalise came the problem that in the absence of any foundational norms to use as standards by which to judge, the study of history itself became impossible: “[a]ll standards suggested by history as such proved to be fundamentally ambiguous and therefore unfit to be considered standards.” This means that for Strauss, historicism’s attempt to remove universals in favour of the context-specific led ultimately to relativism because the absence of such standards made the study of history itself impossible, except perhaps through the inclusion of certain substitute values which fulfilled the same function, i.e. provided a standard by which to judge, as the rejected universal values. This meant essentially that a clandestine replacement occurred, wherein more apparently neutral notions came to perform the function of more explicitly value-laden premises. As Strauss comments, “such substitutes were found, for example, in institutions or in economies, and

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44 Minowitz, Straussophobia, p. 152.
perhaps the most important substitute is what is called ‘the historical process’. Such apparently historically specific notions were themselves shown to rely implicitly on the very values they sought to distance themselves from, in other words, on equally insubstantial foundations.

This suggests that reason cannot be utilised to choose between competing values; reason is itself part of and defined by our historical circumstances and any categories thought up would necessarily be partisan. This amounts to a rejection of the notion of any trans-historical or transcendental reason, an objective reason which might see beyond the confines of specific historical circumstances. In other words, we lack the means by which to decide between different ethical propositions; reason, our only tool, is always already inadequate as it is imbedded in and fundamentally limited to the particular historical context, and hence cannot be impartial or objective; our choice of values, he asserts, “has no support but itself; it is not supported by any objective or theoretical certainty.”

This means, according to Strauss, that historicism precludes the possibility of recourse to or ascent towards essential or foundational values. In his words, historicism

assumes that philosophy, in the full and original sense of the term, namely, the attempt to replace opinions about the whole by knowledge of the whole, is not only incapable of achieving its goal but absurd, because the very idea of philosophy rests on dogmatic, that is arbitrary, premises or, more specifically, on premises that are only ‘historical and relative’.

This entails, according to Strauss, that historicism undermines the possibility that knowledge about ‘the whole’, i.e. the inherent nature of things, including values, can be attained through the exercise of human reason and philosophical endeavour. As he comments, the “dogmatic character of the basic premise of philosophy is said to have been revealed by the discovery of history or the ‘historicity’ of human life.”

This ‘discovery’ leads to such conclusions as, he continues,

what is called the whole is actually always incomplete and therefore not truly a whole; the whole is essentially changing in such a manner that its future cannot be predicted; the whole as it is in is itself can never be grasped, or it is not intelligible; human thought essentially depends on something that cannot be anticipated or that can never be an object or that can never be mastered by the subject.

For Strauss, historicism points towards an overwhelming and immobilising relativisation of value. According to Zuckert, for Strauss “the ‘historical’ turn in philosophy had not merely destroyed belief in human freedom and progress; the foundations of all moral standards had

48 Strauss, Natural Right and History, p. 27.
49 Strauss, Natural Right and History, p. 30.
50 Strauss, Natural Right and History, p. 31.
51 Strauss, Natural Right and History, p. 31.
been erased along with belief in the biblical God and the possibility of knowledge.”52 As he put it, this relativism “came to Nietzsche’s attention in the form of historicism,” and he saw that

our own principles, including the belief in progress, will become as relative as all earlier principles had shown themselves to be; not only the thought of the past but also our own thought must be understood to depend on premises which for us are inescapable, but of which we know they are condemned to perish.53

Historicism, Strauss concludes, “teaches a truth that is deadly.” This deadly truth is that culture is possible only if men are fully dedicated to principles of thought and action which they do not and cannot question, which limit their horizon and thus enable them to have a character and a style. It shows us at the same time that any principles of this kind can be questioned and even rejected.54

This point occupies a central place in the reading of the Straussian logic and interventions which will be developed below.

As well as the challenges posed by historicism, Strauss was also concerned by the premises and arguments of existentialism, specifically the work of Heidegger. Like positivistic social science, and indeed historicism, Strauss believed that existentialism was intimately connected to the crisis of the West: “The situation to which existentialism belongs can be seen to be liberal democracy, or, more precisely, a liberal democracy which has become uncertain of itself and of its future. Existentialism belongs to the decline of Europe.”55 It would appear that Strauss thought very highly of the work of the existentialists, in particular he thought it superior to positivistic social science. Heidegger’s work led, according to Strauss, to a situation wherein “all rational liberal philosophic positions have lost their significance and power.”56 In his words, “Existentialism faces the situation with which positivism is confronted but does not grasp: the fact that reason has become radically problematic.”57 Heidegger was, he asserts, able to confront the problem of the insufficiency of reason and the groundlessness of value.

Strauss states: “Existentialism begins... with the realization that at the ground of all objective, rational knowledge we discover an abyss... Objectively there is in the last analysis only meaninglessness, nothingness.”58 Unlike historicism, however, Strauss argues, existentialism understands the dangers of this groundlessness and instability; it “admits the truth of relativism, but it realizes that relativism, so far from being a solution or even a relief,

52 Zuckert, “Strauss’s Return to Premodern Thought.,” p. 109
53 Leo Strauss, “Relativism”, in Pangle (ed.) The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism, p. 25
54 Strauss, “Relativism”, p. 25.
is deadly.” The consequence of this realisation of the danger of the abyss is that, Strauss asserts, man constructs for himself a network or matrix of meaning, something that he must do in order to function personally and socially; man “conceals from him[self] the abyss of which he must be aware if he wants to be truly human.” This divergence between historicism and existentialism, while significant, does not undermine the degree to which Strauss seems to have concurred with both that reason has indeed been fatally undermined as a means by which to attain foundational knowledge or values, that an abyss resides at the core of reason.

This may imply that there is no longer any possibility, in Strauss’ eyes, that we might be able to strive towards universally applicable values or truths. In his words, “the notion of a rational morality [has]... lost its standing completely; all choices are, it is argued, ultimately nonrational or irrational.” Elsewhere he claims that “every morality is based on some tyranny against nature as well as against reason.” Stanley Rosen confirms that Strauss concurred with Heidegger in this context: “It is quite clear from Strauss’s own words that he has no adequate defense against Heidegger’s fundamental views, nor does he find any prospect of assistance in the various philosophical positions of his day.” Thus for Strauss relativism is indeed the true condition of man; an abyss resides at the heart of society, social science and philosophy. For Strauss, then, the Nietzschean and Heideggerian challenges to philosophy were justified and irrefutable; the modern tradition had in its very creation sowed the seeds of its own demise by exposing the abyss.

In summary, for Strauss the modern philosophical project served to undermine the possibility of universal or foundational values and principles:

By denying the significance, if not the existence, of universal norms, the historical school destroyed the only solid basis of all efforts to transcend the actual... It certainly acted as if it intended to make men absolutely at home in ‘this world’. Since any universal principles make at least most men potentially homeless, it depreciated universal principles in favour of historical principles... The only standards that remain were of a purely subjective character. No objective criterion henceforth allowed the distinction between good and bad choices. Historicism culminated in nihilism. The attempt to make man absolutely at home in this world ended in man’s becoming absolutely homeless.

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60 Strauss, “An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism,” p. 36. The assumption here about the possibility and nature of the ‘truly human’ will be explored in Part II.
64 Strauss, Natural Right and History, pp. 15-18.
Thus for Strauss, despite the intentions of the moderns, their undermining of convention led to historicism, which paved the way for nihilism due to the exposure of the abyss. Crucially for Strauss, attempting to live without such standards, i.e. living with the abyss, entails a risk of descent into extremism.

Strauss was profoundly concerned with what he saw as the possible political consequences of the abyssal condition; as Allan Bloom notes, for Strauss the “particular horror of modern tyranny has been its alliance with perverted philosophy.” The risk as Strauss saw it was that in the absence of fixed moral standards, no boundaries or barriers exist to curb the worst excesses of human behaviour. In his words,

Heidegger became a Nazi in 1933. This was not due to a mere error of judgement on the part of a man who lived on great heights high above the low land of politics. Everyone who had read his first great book and did not overlook the wood for the trees could see the kinship in temper and direction between Heidegger’s thought and the Nazis.

As Dana Villa reiterates, Strauss argued that Heidegger had “contempt for such ‘permanencies’ as the distinction between the noble and the base. It was this contempt, Strauss suggests, which led directly to Heidegger’s affiliation with National Socialism in 1933.” Strauss thus claimed that Heidegger was “intellectually the counterpart to what Hitler was politically.” Strauss also looks further back, to Nietzsche, claiming that the “case of Heidegger reminds one to a certain extent of the case of Nietzsche. Nietzsche, naturally, would not have sided with Hitler. Yet there is an undeniable kinship between Nietzsche’s thought and fascism.” The reason for this relationship is, as Drury explains, that for Strauss nihilism “may be passive and resign itself to the meaningless chaos of the world; but it is more likely to be active and resolve to impose order and meaning on the void. Nazism is an active nihilism whose power has become augmented by modern technology.” It would thus appear that the exposure of the abyss in the modern project resides at the heart of Strauss’ political philosophy, which can be read as a response to precisely this. Resisting such pernicious effects of the abyss can be seen to be central to Strauss’ project; to that end he turned to ancient philosophy.

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66 Strauss, “An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism.” p. 30. This presumption of the kinship between a radical historicist position and political extremism will be challenged in Part II.
70 Drury, *Leo Strauss and the American Right*, p. 66.
Countering the Abyss: the Invocation of Ancient Philosophy

In the opening lines of the introduction to *The City and Man*, Strauss states:

> It is not self-forgetting and pain-loving antiquarianism nor self-forgetting and intoxicating romanticism which induces us to turn with passionate interest, with unqualified willingness to learn, toward the political thought of classical antiquity. We are impelled to do so by the crisis of our time, the crisis of the West.\(^\text{71}\)

He thus makes the explicit claim that it is from the lessons of antiquity, rather than from those of modern philosophy, that the crisis of the West can be understood and solutions to it conceived of. We should, he contends, “consider alternatives” to the modern project and its relativising consequences, for instance “to stop where we are, or else, if this is possible, to return.” He explains that by the term ‘return’ he means to suggest ‘repentance’: “Repentance is return, meaning the return from the wrong way to the right one. This implies that we were on the right way before we turned to the wrong way.”\(^\text{72}\) By ‘classical’ philosophy, Strauss refers to ancient Greek texts primarily, although Jewish and Islamic thinkers are also of interest to him.

Strauss makes his attachment to ancient as opposed to modern philosophy explicit: “I *really* believe that the perfect political order, as Plato and Aristotle have sketched it, *is* the perfect political order.” He continues in the same letter, “I myself might actually agree with everything that Plato and Aristotle demand (but that I tell only you).”\(^\text{73}\) Elsewhere, Strauss claims:

> In all later epochs, the philosophers’ study of political things was mediated by a tradition of political philosophy which acted like a screen between the philosopher and political things... From this it follows that the classical philosophers see the political things with a freshness and directness which have never been equalled.\(^\text{74}\)

It is thus suggested that the ancients had a superior perspective to the moderns regarding politics. Strauss reaffirms this when he claims that as “a matter of fact, there is in the whole work of Machiavelli not a single true observation regarding the nature of man and of human affairs with which the classics were not thoroughly familiar.”\(^\text{75}\) Here, Strauss implies that ancient philosophers, far from being inferior or naive in comparison to the moderns, were


\(^{72}\) Strauss, “Progress or Return,” p. 227. This emphasis on the question of being redeemed, saved, or secured from the abyssal encounter is noteworthy and will be subject to critique in Part II.

\(^{73}\) Leo Strauss, Letter to Karl Lowith, January 1946, cited in Sheppard, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile*, p. 104. Emphasis in original. This statement of hesitating to convey one’s real beliefs to a wide audience is highly significant and will be discussed in detail below.

\(^{74}\) Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?*, p. 27.

\(^{75}\) Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?*, p. 43.
aware of all that which the latter thought they had discovered. More specifically, the mistake made by the moderns of lowering standards and removing religious and conventional values was avoided, Strauss claims, by the ancients; their standards were set by what is high in life, not by the ordinary. Part of the problem, Strauss claims, is the assumption of equality in modern philosophy.

Strauss insisted that “moral virtue,” the aim of man, “is not possible without ‘equipment’ and that for this reason alone, to say nothing of natural inequality, moral virtue in the full sense is not within the reach of all men.” Accordingly, for Strauss this entails that there exists a fundamental inequality between a very few capable of attaining such virtue, and the many, for whom such a task would be both impossible and unintelligible. The lowering of standards in modern philosophy thus upsets this natural hierarchy for Strauss, making the goals of the non-virtuous many the end of society. As Strauss notes,

according to classical philosophy the end of the philosophers is radically different from the end or ends actually pursued by the nonphilosophers. Modern philosophy comes into being when the end of philosophy is identified with the end which is capable of being actually pursued by all men. More precisely, philosophy is now asserted to be essentially subservient to the end which is capable of being pursued by all men.

This reflects Strauss’ concern of the ‘lowering of standards’ in the modern project. For Strauss, philosophy is the highest activity of man, and is separated from the concerns of politics and society; that its ends are perhaps unrealisable does not entail that more easily attainable standards should be set. For Strauss, the true philosopher is aware, as was Socrates, that attainment of knowledge of the good is impossible:

Philosophy is essentially not possession of the truth, but the quest for it. The distinctive trait of the philosopher is that “he knows he knows nothing,” and that his insight into our ignorance concerning the most important things induced him to strive with all his power for knowledge.

It is thus the pursuit itself, as opposed to the expectation of resolution or concrete solutions, which is the end of philosophy; the philosopher is aware of the elusiveness of the whole and his goal is to pose questions rather that to establish answers. Strauss suggests that the philosopher

would cease to be a philosopher by evading the questions concerning these things [the most profound of philosophical problems] or by disregarding them because they cannot be answered. It may be that as regards the possible answers to these questions, the pros and cons will always be in a more or less even balance, are therefore that philosophy will never go beyond the stage of discussion or disputation.

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78 Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?*, p. 11.
and will never reach the stage of decision. This would not make philosophy futile...
Genuine knowledge of a fundamental question, thorough understanding of it, is better than blindness to it, or indifference to it.\textsuperscript{79}

It is precisely because philosophy can never arrive at the truth about the whole that it must remain the preserve of the philosophers and be kept separate from society; because, as philosophers know, there is no solid grounding in philosophy upon which to base a preference for any particular series of opinions over any other, social beliefs are in reality context-specific and contingent, i.e. the reality of social belief is that they are indeed relative.

It is for this reason that the beliefs of society must remain unchallenged by the continuous questioning of philosophy; social cohesion and the pursuit of the common good depend on the survival of a series of beliefs and opinions. These beliefs or opinions which are held by society are thus necessarily at odds with the pursuit of truth, understood by Strauss as philosophy; as he puts it, “it is essential to political philosophy to be set in motion, and be kept in motion, by the disquieting awareness of the fundamental difference between conviction, or belief, and knowledge.”\textsuperscript{80} It is in this way that Strauss implies that the fundamental inequality of men is manifest. The philosopher, the rare individual who is capable of pursuing truth and virtue, is set apart from the masses because he alone can understand and withstand the fundamental difference between truth and belief. All those who are not philosophers see only belief; they reside in the Platonic ‘Cave’. Following Plato, Strauss asserts that

the cave-dwellers, i.e. the non-philosophers, see only the shadows of artefacts. That is to say whatever they perceive they understand in the light of opinions sanctified by the fiat of legislators, regarding the just and noble things, i.e. of fabricated or conventional opinions, and they do not know that these their most cherished convictions possess no higher status than that of opinions.\textsuperscript{81}

Although the philosopher cannot break free entirely from the cave, he cannot discover the ultimate and universal truth of the whole and he cannot operate in a way which is entirely divorced from his location in socio-political belief and opinion, he is aware of the nature of the cave; the philosopher, unlike the non-philosopher, is aware of the contingent and constructed nature of the artefacts of the cave. This, for Strauss, is the fundamental error made by the moderns: in allowing, indeed encouraging, philosophy and reason to permeate society, they failed to understand that which the ancients knew well, that philosophy and society must be kept separate as they are mutually antagonistic and destructive of each other.

As Timothy Fuller notes, in light of

\textsuperscript{79} Strauss, \textit{What is Political Philosophy?}, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{80} Strauss, \textit{What is Political Philosophy?}, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{81} Strauss, \textit{The City and Man}, p. 125.
the trial and death and Socrates, one cannot ignore the possibility of another
collection of political philosophy: that it is the pursuit of philosophy with an eye to
the danger to philosophy and the philosopher inherent in philosophy’s allegiance to
that which transcends political allegiance. The philosopher must be aware of the uses
to which philosophy may be put, and also of the imputation of philosophy to
disloyalty. Thus, the philosopher must also consider how to preserve philosophy from
the intermingling of political and philosophical pursuits.82

Thus a certain danger was perceived by Strauss in the exercise of philosophical questioning.

This danger can be seen to be closely related to Strauss’ ‘rediscovery’ of esotericism,
which is heralded by Lampert as “nothing less than the recovery of the possibility of
philosophy,” insofar as it refutes the historicist thesis that knowledge can only ever be
context specific; it “makes it evident that the great philosophers transcended their time and
place...” 83 It is also, however, very difficult to comment upon, especially for those of us who
have not been privy to it. Indeed, commentators defensive of Strauss often invoke this as
grounds that scholars outside the tradition are ill-equipped to offer an account. Minowitz, for
instance, asks whether certain scholars outside the tradition have “studied Strauss, and even
a sampling of the philosophers Strauss wrote about, carefully enough to issue a proclamation
about Strauss’s ‘esoteric strategies’.”84

Strauss claims that up until “the last third of the eighteenth century, the view that all
the ancient philosophers had distinguished between their exoteric and their esoteric teaching
was still maintained.”85 Because it is necessary that prevalent salutary opinion remain
unchallenged in society, Strauss claims that philosophers communicated their ideas among
those able to see through a process of writing esoterically. By this, he means that

the proper work of a writing is to truly talk, or to reveal the truth, to some while
leading others to salutary opinions; the proper work of a writing is to arose to
thinking those who are by nature fit for it; the good writing achieves its end if the
reader considers carefully the “logographic necessity” of every part, however small or
seemingly insignificant, of the writing.86

This reaffirms Strauss’ contention that the ancients did not view men as equal but rather as
naturally unequal. Turning to Plato, and also to Xenophon’s Socrates, Strauss asserts that

the latter

did not approach all men in the same manner. He approached differently the men
possessing good natures by whom he was naturally attracted on the one hand, and

82 Timothy Fuller, “The Complementarity of Political Philosophy,” in Smith (ed.), The Cambridge Companion
to Leo Strauss, p. 244.
Strauss, p. 76. This account will be challenged in Part II.
84 Minowitz, Straussophobia, p. 193. While I cannot be sure I have studied Strauss to the extent Minowitz and
others would deem acceptable, an account of this will nevertheless be offered.
86 Strauss, The City and Man, p. 54.
the various types of men lacking good natures on the other. The men possessing good
natures are the gifted ones: those who are quick to learn, have a good memory and
are desirous for all worthwhile subjects of learning... [He] tried to lead those who are
able to think toward the truth and to lead the others toward agreement in salutary
opinions or to confirm them in such opinions.87

Thus Strauss claims that, since Socrates, philosophers have conveyed their true beliefs in an
esoteric manner; their texts have an exoteric meaning which is accessible to all who might
read it, but hidden beneath this more obvious meaning lies the true beliefs of the
philosopher, ideas which must remain hidden from all but a select few lest they undermine
and destroy the salutary opinions upon which society is based or place their author in danger
for disseminating unorthodox views. This process can occur successfully according to Strauss
because “thoughtless men are careless readers, and only thoughtful men are careful
readers,”88 and this means that it is only the naturally superior few who will be able to
discern the philosopher’s true meaning.

This process is outlined by Strauss as follows: the author of heterodox views must
learn to write between the lines so that only the capable few are able to discern his true
meaning. He will, then, begin his writing by stating the traditional view “in the quiet,
unspectacular and somewhat boring manner which would seem to be natural; he would use
many technical terms, give many quotations and attach undue importance to insignificant
details.”89 The author would thus produce an account which seems no different from other
traditional writings on his subject. It is, Strauss claims, “only when he reached the core of the
argument would he write three or four sentences in that terse and lively style which is apt to
arrest the attention of young men who love to think.”90 Then the careful reader “would for
the first time catch a glimpse of the forbidden fruit,” and after rereading the work would,
“after having tasted the forbidden fruit... be merely disgusted and... even bored”91 by the
more obvious traditional account present on the surface of the text. An example of this
provided by Strauss relates to the works of the philosopher al Farabi. Strauss claims that
throughout his treatise entitled On the Attainment of Happiness, Farabi accepts uncritically
Plato’s distinction between “the happiness of this world in this life” and “the ultimate
happiness in the other life,” i.e. happiness in life after death. He thus appears to be
propounding an orthodox view of the time that there is indeed an afterlife. However, Strauss
suggests, in al Farabi’s Plato, “which is the second and therefore least exposed part of a
tripartite work, the distinction between the two types of happiness is completely dropped.”92

87 Strauss, The City and Man, pp 53-4
89 Strauss, Persecution and the Art of Writing, p. 24.
90 Strauss, Persecution and the Art of Writing, p. 24.
91 Strauss, Persecution and the Art of Writing, p. 25.
92 Strauss, Persecution and the Art of Writing, p. 13.
“What this silence means,” Strauss argues, “becomes clear from the fact that in the whole Plato (which contains summaries of the Gorgias, the Phaedrus, the Phaedo, and the Republic), there is no mention of the immortality of the soul: Farabi’s Plato silently rejects Plato’s doctrine of a life after death.” Thus, it is through his own omissions and subtle inconsistencies that the true beliefs of the philosopher may be discerned, but only by those few who are able to perceive such details.

A further elaboration is provided by Minowitz. Challenging some of the more dismissive and insulting criticisms of Strauss’ account of esotericism, Minowitz explains that certain numbers can be seen as significant. For instance, in his treatment of Machiavelli, Strauss notes that “the number of chapters of the Discourses is meaningful and has been deliberately chosen,” and claims that its twenty-sixth chapter bears “an uncanny and momentous resemblance to The Prince”. That the twenty-sixth chapter contains the only citation from the New Testament in either text, Minowitz explains, allows Machiavelli to convey the “most horrible blasphemy” that “God is a tyrant whom human princes should imitate.” Such connections seem sufficiently convincing for Minowitz to comment that “highly accomplished scholars continue to be swayed – dare I suckered? – by Machiavelli’s efforts to appear religious.” Similarly, Paul Cantor notes that Strauss insists one should “pay close attention to what goes on at or near the middle of a work, and to discount what is said at the beginning or end,” as the middle is where the real view of the author will be hidden.

Esoteric writing does not, as Lampert comments, mean the use of unusual words; the “‘secret’ words are no hocus pocus; they are the most honoured words of everyday use supplied with a meaning very different from their everyday sense, turning them ironic when used by artful speakers like Socrates or Maimonides.” Indeed, Strauss posited that Socrates engaged extensively in this practice; he hid “what he meant in words of praise for what he judged to be socially necessary; morality was merely a means for an immoralist who

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93 Strauss, Persecution and the Art of Writing, p. 13.
95 Minowitz, Straussophobia, p. 226. While the attention to detail in such practices of interpretation is noteworthy, the inferences and connections made in such a process are far from self-evident, and a reading of the logic underpinning such moves will be provided below. The distinction between meanings discovered and meanings created here has not been established, and the grounds upon which Minowitz can reject, for instance, Drury’s assessment of Strauss on the grounds of insufficient textual evidence while endorsing Strauss’ far more unconventional interpretative moves remains undefended. A certain self-exemption from the constraints of their own position seems to be implicit in the Straussian account, a feature which will be explored in detail in Part II. Minowitz, Straussophobia, p. 235.
96 Minowitz, Straussophobia, p. 235.
understood society’s need to believe in morality.”99 Esotericism can thus be read as reflective of the ancients’ concern that “there is a conflict between philosophy and accepting the gods of the city”;100 they knew that the influence of philosophy must be limited in order to preserve such essential points of reference. In Strauss’ words, “it is as true today as it was more than two thousand years ago that it is a safe venture to tell the truth one knows to benevolent and trustworthy acquaintances, or more precisely, to reasonable friends.”101 This truth may be expressed as, in Strauss’ terms, “natural morality is, strictly speaking, no morality at all: it is hardly distinguishable from the morality essential to the preservation of the gang of robbers.”102 This entails that “a purely rational or natural morality, a morality from sources of reason alone, can never be a sufficient ground for morality.”103 Thus, because it is only “a certain horizon or opinion that gives significance and moral direction to people’s lives,”104 what is necessary are precisely the conventional and religious values and opinions which the modern project undermined; given this mistake, it is necessary to resurrect them. The philosopher is, for Strauss, then, the only type of human being capable of experiencing aporia, or the abyss; all others require a netting or matrix of value and belief within which to live.

The Generation and Preservation of Salutary Social Opinions

As a consequence of modernity’s undermining of conventional social mores, Strauss submits that “man erects around himself an artificial netting which conceals him from the abyss...”105 This netting is artificial because, as Nietzsche and Heidegger demonstrated, universal or essential values cannot be possible: “knowledge of the whole is unattainable, all human beings will ever have are opinions.”106 Such netting amounts, then, to the opinions and norms of society which perform socially salutary functions; they form, for Strauss, an indispensable protective barrier, securing man from dangers of the abyss. Society is then,
according to Strauss, fundamentally reliant upon this netting of opinions and assumptions relating to ideas about the good. He asserts:

In studying certain earlier thinkers, I became aware of this way of conceiving the relation between the quest for truth (philosophy or science) and society: Philosophy or science, the highest activity of man, is the attempt to replace opinion about ‘all things’ by knowledge of ‘all things’; but opinion is the element of society; philosophy or science is therefore the attempt to dissolve the element in which society breathes, and thus it endangers society.107

In other words, philosophy is destructive of the opinions society depends upon to survive. He explains that “opinion is the element of society... [I]t rests on specific values or specific myths, i.e., on assumptions which are not evidently superior or preferable to any alternative assumptions.”108 For Strauss, philosophy exposes the foundationlessness of all social opinions, which, once exposed as contingent, can no longer be believed in the same manner.

However, the dismantling of traditional and conventional opinions in the modern project has led to the exposure of the foundationlessness of social opinions, i.e. the abyss. The essential arbitrariness of social opinion must only, according to Strauss, be recognised by those few in society who undertake the study of philosophy in the strict sense; philosophy “must remain the preserve of a small minority, and philosophers or scientists must respect the opinions on which society rests. To respect opinions is far from accepting them as true.”109 Strauss thus intimates that such opinion must be taken by the vast majority of society to be truth but is in reality no more than a socially expedient construct; as he put it, any particular opinions “are not evidently superior to any alternative assumptions.”110 It is, according to Strauss, a mark of the best realisable city that its citizens are firmly and unflinchingly committed to its opinions and assumptions. Because of the inherent antagonism between opinion and philosophy, the stronger the grip of prevalent social belief and the weaker the influence of philosophy, the better the outcome for the city and society. It is with this in mind that Strauss asserts that,

if even the best city stands or falls by a fundamental falsehood, albeit a noble falsehood, it can be expected that the opinions on which the imperfect cities rest or in which they believe will not be true, to say the least. Precisely the best of the non-philosophers, the good citizens, are passionately attached to these opinions and therefore passionately opposed to philosophy which is the attempt to go beyond opinion toward knowledge.111

As he comments elsewhere, “untrue stories are needed not only for little children but also for the grown-up citizens of the good city, but it is probably best if they are imbued with these

107 Strauss, What is Political Philosophy?, p. 221.
108 Strauss, What is Political Philosophy?, p. 222.
109 Strauss, What is Political Philosophy?, p. 222.
110 Strauss, What is Political Philosophy?, p. 222.
111 Strauss, The City and Man, p. 125.
stories from the earliest possible moment.”¹¹² To mitigate the pernicious consequences of the abyss, then, ideas and opinion must be in constant circulation and reaffirmation for Strauss:

> even a mass culture and precisely a mass culture requires a constant supply of what are called new ideas, which are the products of creative minds: even singing commercials lose their appeal if they are not varied from time to time.¹¹³

Thus, he claims, the ancients were correct in positing that, “the good city is not possible without a fundamental falsehood; it cannot exist in the element of truth...”.¹¹⁴

Strauss discusses this in the context of the Platonic ‘Noble Lie’, which consists of two parts. Firstly, it teaches citizens to “forget the truth about their education or the true character of their becoming citizens,” instilling in them the sense that they regard themselves as children of one and the same mother and nurse, the earth, and hence as brothers, but in such a way that the earth is to be identified with a part of the earth, with the particular land or territory belonging to the particular city in question: the fraternity of all human beings is to be replaced by the fraternity of all fellow citizens.¹¹⁵

Secondly, it directs citizens to accept inequality; it “qualifies this qualified fraternity by the fundamental inequality of brothers; while the fraternity is traced to the earth, the inequality is traced to the god.”¹¹⁶ The invocation of religious belief here is significant; the implication may be that Strauss believed it to be the only counterbalance to reason capable of instilling opinions into citizens: “only revelation can transform natural man into ‘the guardian of his city,’ or, to use the language of the Bible, the guardian of his brother.”¹¹⁷ In Strauss’ words, “society is not possible if ancestral custom is not regarded as sacred as far as practice is concerned.”¹¹⁸ While Minowitz and the Zuckerts attempt to reassure that “Strauss emphasised the noble, not the lie,” and that he encouraged such practices only on the grounds of securing the “public good,” this reaffirms the notion that the opinions of society should be directed by a few in Strauss’ account, and begs the question, so central to Strauss’ project, of how and by whom the good may be established. Salutary opinions are not, thus, salutary by virtue of their content; as has been shown, the abyss exposes the extent to which standards by which to judge opinions are lacking. Such opinion is, rather, salutary due to its unifying function; what is believed is less significant than that something is believed in

¹¹² Strauss, The City and Man, p. 98.
¹¹³ Strauss, Liberalism Ancient and Modern, p. 5.
¹¹⁴ Strauss, The City and Man, p. 102.
¹¹⁵ Strauss, The City and Man, p. 102. This is a vital statement for the purposes of this thesis because it provides a statement of one of the assumptions underpinning the Straussian position which will be critiqued in Part II, namely the drawing of boundaries to delimit realms of responsibility between human beings. The Platonic Noble Lie as Strauss reads it may be seen to be central to the development of the territorialisation of responsibility so objected to by post-structuralist and other critical scholars.
¹¹⁶ Strauss, The City and Man, p. 102.
society. The content of salutary opinion is defined in terms of the reason of the strongest; good and evil become manifest through such an imposition.

Strauss questions why it is that individuals in society come to believe in certain values and principles over others; he argues that, “they have not been convinced by compulsion, for compulsion does not produce conviction.” He examines the social context within which beliefs and opinions develop, commenting on the notion of freedom of thought, and claims that what is called freedom of thought in a large number of cases amounts to – and even for all practical purposes consists of – the ability to choose between two or more different views presented by the small minority of people who are public speakers or writers.

In this way, he suggests that what appears to be freedom of thought is always already directed and constructed in reference to a power-wielding establishment; choices of belief are limited and constrained by pre-existing values and assumptions which are bound up with power relations within society. Thus for Strauss, it is not compulsion, in the sense of coercion, which directs the formation of social opinion but rather the interrelation of power and established assumptions, and this interrelation “paves the way for conviction by silencing contradiction.” Law, and its relationship to justice, is centrally significant here. Strauss comments that according to the ancients, the “highest opinions, the authoritative opinions, are the pronouncements of the law. The law makes manifest the just and noble things and it speaks authoritatively about the highest beings, the gods who dwell in heaven.” He continues: “The law, the most important instrument for the moral education of ‘the many,’ must then be supported by ancestral opinions, by myths – for instance, by myths which speak of the gods as if they were human beings – or by a ‘civil theology’.” Such processes of generating meaning, which will be referred to here as ‘construction’ through which the impact of the abyss might be mitigated, require exploration.

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120 Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, p. 23.
121 Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, pp. 22-3. The delimitation and direction of apparent choices by the few in society resonates very closely with the Straussian interventions to be explored below.
Three Dimensions of the Generation of Meaning: the Schmittean Friend/Enemy Dichotomy, the Tyrannous Regime, and Justice

The generation of salutary opinions can be perceived in at least three interrelated dimensions of Strauss’ political philosophy: the Schmittean friend/enemy binary, the concept of ‘tyranny’ as a vital type of ‘regime’, and the question of justice as amounting to the reason of the strongest. To take these in order, Strauss’ use of the friend/enemy dichotomy relates to the work of Carl Schmitt. According to Sheppard, Strauss viewed Schmitt as “not only a senior ally engaged in the critique of liberalism, but as a fellow searcher on the quest to discover an alternative political cosmos.”

Smith notes that Strauss’ “review of Schmitt coincided with a ‘change of orientation’ that would lead him to focus on the priority of political philosophy.” The review mentioned here refers to Strauss’ response to Schmitt’s *On the Concept of the Political*, which was very well received by the latter, who “wrote a professional evaluation for Strauss and his studies of Hobbes that contributed substantially to Strauss’ receiving a grant from the Rockerfeller Foundation in May 1932.” Strauss clearly admired the work of Schmitt; Eugene Sheppard cites a letter from the former to the latter in which he states: “the interest that you have shown in my studies of Hobbes represents the most honourable and crucial vindication of my scholarly work that has ever been bestowed on me and that I could ever dream of.”

Binaries such as the friend/enemy relation are central to the work of Schmitt. Shadia Drury notes that for Schmitt, “each domain of existence has its own peculiar dualism: morality is about good and evil, economics is about profits and liabilities, and aesthetics is about beauty and ugliness.” The fundamental dichotomy of the political sphere was for Schmitt the friend/enemy binary, and this relation was for Schmitt a “far deeper opposition” than those of the other realms. In his words, if “the distinction between friend and enemy ceases even as a mere possibility, there will be a politics-free Weltanschauung, culture, civilisation, economy, morals, law, art...” Political society is thus, for Schmitt, radically dependent upon this opposition; the enemy is essential for society to orient itself. As Strauss...
notes, for Schmitt, this relation underpins the political as such; Schmitt “affirms the political because he sees in the threatened status of the political a threat to the seriousness of human life. The affirmation of the political is ultimately nothing other than the affirmation of the moral.” \(^{132}\) In other words, Strauss recognises in Schmitt’s insistence on this dichotomy a concern, like his own, to rescue modern society from degradation and descent into mediocrity and relativism. As he puts it,

> politics and the state are the only guarantee against the world’s becoming a world of entertainment; therefore, what opponents of the political want is ultimately tantamount to establishing a world of entertainment, a world of amusement, a world without seriousness.\(^{133}\)

For Strauss, then, Schmitt’s project, like his own, addresses this crisis of the West; the relation of the friend/enemy is crucial for this because without it there would be “no opposition on the basis of which it could sensibly be demanded of men that they sacrifice their lives.” \(^{134}\) To avoid such a descent, as Drury comments, Schmitt advocated inferring values and morals from citizens’ “physical, linguistic, cultural, moral, or religious sameness.” \(^{135}\) Thus for Schmitt, it was imperative that persons within a society consider one another friends, and those outside enemies. Society must then be inward looking, and hostile towards outsiders.

> These themes are clearly discernable in Strauss’ writings; as Sheppard notes, “Strauss followed Schmitt in using his conception of the political to point out the inherent weaknesses and deficiencies of modern liberalism.” \(^{136}\) Strauss seems to corroborate this in his statement that Schmitt’s conceptualisation of “the political – the grouping of humanity into friends and enemies – owes its legitimation to the seriousness of the question of what is right.” \(^{137}\) Even defenders of Strauss accept Strauss’ reliance upon this dichotomy; as Minowitz notes, “the friend/enemy distinction is obviously integral to polis-type societies,” \(^{138}\) the like of which Strauss favoured.

> Strauss shares with Schmitt an emphasis on the need for societies to be closed. As Susan Shell explains, Strauss followed Schmitt in asserting that “the root of moral life is the closed society because without war and its imminent threat, life lacks the sublime intensity that makes us truly human.” She continues: “Whatever moral value the West retains depends

\(^{132}\) Strauss, “Notes on Carl Schmitt’s The Concept of the Political,” pp. 112-113.

\(^{133}\) Strauss, “Notes on Carl Schmitt’s The Concept of the Political,” p. 112. Emphasis in original.

\(^{134}\) Schmitt, quoted in Strauss, “Notes on Carl Schmitt’s The Concept of the Political,” p. 112.

\(^{135}\) Drury, Leo Strauss and the American Right, p. 83.

\(^{136}\) Sheppard, Leo Strauss and the Politics of Exile, p. 66.

\(^{137}\) Strauss, Notes on Carl Schmitt’s The Concept of the Political,” p. 115.

\(^{138}\) Minowitz, Straussofobia, p. 162. He continues to distance Strauss from the ‘warlike morals’ and advocacy of ‘physical killing’ immanent to Schmitt’s writings; that the former was less ‘polemical’, as Minowitz claims, is certainly the case.
entirely upon their being closed societies (i.e. ready for war).”

Society should be inward looking because, Strauss claims, “man is most likely to love that whose interest he believes to be identical with his own interest or whose happiness he believes to be the condition of his own happiness.”

The ancients, he emphasises, recognised that the city “separates itself from others by opposing or resisting them; the opposition of ‘We’ and ‘They’ is essential to the political association.”

Similarly, he states that in society,

the just man is he who does not harm, but loves, his friends and neighbours, i.e., his fellow citizens, but who does harm or who hates his enemies, i.e., the foreigners who as such are at least potential enemies of his city.

Xenos reinforces this, claiming that “Strauss effectively states... that the basis of political life is enmity. War, the distinction between friends and enemies, is essential to political life...”

This opposition of friend and enemy can be understood as part of the Platonic Noble Lie which entails, according to Strauss, that persons view only their fellow citizens, and not those outside the bounded political community, as objects of concern. In his words, the “noble lie is to bring about the maximum of caring for the city and for one another on the part of the ruled.” As Zuckert reiterates, Strauss believed that

Socrates shows in the Republic [that] the root of injustice cannot be eradicated without eradicating the reasons why human beings join political associations in the first place, their desire to preserve themselves and their kind. This love of one’s own is, indeed, essential to political life, because without it, no one would risk his or her life to defend the community from aggression.

A further means by which salutary social opinion may be generated for Strauss relates to his use notion of the ‘regime’, with particular reference to the concept of ‘tyranny’. Smith asserts that at “the centre of Strauss’ political science stands the concept of the regime or the way in which institutions are structured in any community.” He continues:

The core of classical political philosophy – the central idea from which all the spokes radiate – is the concept of the regime. ‘Regime’... signifies both the way power is shared in a community and something like the fundamental law of the land, the constitutional principles that order a society. The regime refers to more than the form of government in the relatively narrow legal sense; it refers to the entire way of life of a society, its habits, customs, and moral beliefs...

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140 Strauss, The City and Man, p. 102.
141 Strauss, The City and Man, p. 111.
142 Strauss, Natural Right and History, p. 149. This premise will be central to the critique developed in Part II; that the system of city-states is predicated upon this originary hostility is highly significant.
143 Xenos, Cloaked in Virtue, p. 110.
144 Strauss, The City and Man, p. 102.
145 Zuckert, Postmodern Platos, pp. 257-258.
146 Smith, Reading Leo Strauss, p. 180.
147 Smith, Reading Leo Strauss, p. 188.
Strauss appears to corroborate this understanding of the regime:

Regime is the order, the form, which gives society its character. Regime is therefore a specific manner of life. Regime is the form of life as living together, the manner of living of society and in society, since this manner depends decisively on human beings of a certain type, on the manifest domination of society by human beings of a certain type.\textsuperscript{148}

As well as reemphasising Strauss’ insistence that society should be directed by a select few responsible for generating meaning, this passage expounds his sense of what the ‘regime’ is. More than simply the ways in which the practical infrastructure of society is organised, the regime pertains to the mode of life within a society, the premises and values upon which society rests, the very foundations of society. Strauss states that for the ancients, “the regime is the ‘form’ of the city... [and] who is or is not a citizen depends entirely on the form.”\textsuperscript{149} He comments elsewhere: “what it means to be a good citizen depends entirely on the regime. A good citizen in Hitler’s Germany would be a bad citizen elsewhere... [A] good citizen depends entirely on the regime.”\textsuperscript{150}

Smith emphasises two interrelated dimensions of the ancient concept of the regime, namely, “a factual and a normative component.” It is, he explains, on the one hand, the “descriptive of powers and offices within a political community,” and on the other “it maintains an ideal of human character and conduct to which citizens ought to aspire.” What this suggests, he infers, is that the regime “is entrusted with shaping a certain sense of right and wrong, just and unjust ways of behaviour that distinguish it from other regimes.”\textsuperscript{151} This suggests that for Strauss the concept of the regime plays a fundamentally constitutive role in a society’s self-identification. As Smith confirms, rather than “explaining politics by the behaviour of interest groups or ethnicities, Strauss showed how the behaviour of these groups is fundamentally dependent upon the regime, its governing principles and standards.”\textsuperscript{152} For Strauss, the citizen is fundamentally constituted in light of the regime; as Machiavelli showed, “while men are by nature selfish, and nothing but selfish, hence bad, they can become social, public spirited, or good. This transformation requires compulsion. The success of this compulsion is due to the fact that man is amazingly malleable...”\textsuperscript{153} It is the task of the regime and its guardians, the generators of meaning, to ensure that the citizen is produced in a manner conducive to the ends of society; the regime engenders a

\textsuperscript{148} Strauss, \textit{What is Political Philosophy?}, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{149} Strauss, \textit{The City and Man}, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{150} Strauss, \textit{What is Political Philosophy?}, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{151} Smith, \textit{Reading Leo Strauss}, p. 188.
\textsuperscript{152} Smith, \textit{Reading Leo Strauss}, p. 180.
\textsuperscript{153} Strauss, \textit{What is Political Philosophy?}, p. 42 See Aggie Hirst, “Straussianism and Post-Structuralism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?” in Burns and Connolly (eds.), \textit{The Legacy of Leo Strauss} for discussion of the Straussian conception of the malleable and constituted subject.
“judgement on what is just and unjust, and it is this judgement, however imperfectly expressed, that bestows a fundamental legitimacy on the nature of the regime.”

The meaning and content of justice is, then, generated by the regime, and in doing so it confers its own legitimacy. For this to be effective, as mentioned above in the context of the friend/enemy binary, for Strauss societies must be inward looking and closed; for the regime to effectively generate meaning, external influences must be minimised and resisted through delegitimation as ‘enemy’. In Smith’s assessment, the “ancients understood a regime to be possible only in a relatively small or ‘closed’ society.” He continues:

The conditions of mutual truth and common affection that hold society together are only possible within a small polis-like community. Moral behaviour, the ancients believed, arises from the sense that we have obligations to others. These obligations are felt most strongly to those with whom we have direct attachments – family, friends, compatriots – and radiate out from there... [These] are the building blocks of society without which morality withers and dies.

This seems to be reflected in Strauss’ contention that

[only a society small enough to permit mutual trust is small enough to permit mutual responsibility... An open or all-comprehensive society will exist on a lower level of humanity than a closed society, which, through generations, has made a supreme effort toward human perfection.]

He similarly claims elsewhere that “there can be only closed societies, that is, states. But if this is so, then one can show from political considerations that the small city-state is in principle superior to the large state or to the territorial feudal state.”

This raises the question of what is preferable about a regime within a small and closed state as opposed to a larger or open one. For Strauss it is the task of the creative few within the regime to generate meaning and morality. The closed society is more conducive to such dissemination, according to Strauss, and this may be because the same ideals will be held by citizens. The problem with a more open society is that such generated standards and meanings may be challenged by alternative conceptualisation; this is why external ideas must be treated as a threat. If society’s values as generated by the regime are no more inherently choice-worthy than any others, those of outsiders immediately pose a danger insofar as they risk citizens becoming aware of alternatives and dissenting from the status quo. As Strauss comments in relation to the salutary opinions of society, “in political things it

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154 Smith, Reading Leo Strauss, p. 181.
155 Smith, Reading Leo Strauss, p. 188.
156 Strauss, Natural Right and History, pp. 131-132.
is a sound rule to let sleeping dogs lie or to prefer the established to the nonestablished or to recognize the right of the first occupier.”

Central to Strauss’ rehabilitation of the notion of the regime is the concept of tyranny. Diskin Clay posits that Strauss intended his text On Tyranny to “contribute to our understanding of modern and then contemporary manifestations of the tyrannical life.” Strauss paid great attention to the concept of tyranny. He states:

A social science that cannot speak of tyranny with the same confidence with which medicine speaks, for example, of cancer, cannot understand social phenomena as what they are... present day social science finds itself in this condition... Once we have learned again from the classics what tyranny is, we shall be enabled and compelled to diagnose as tyrannies a number of contemporary regimes which appear in the guise of dictatorships.

This can be read as a clear statement of Strauss’ intention to rehabilitate the classical term ‘tyranny’, and demonstrates the extent to which he deems such a reclassification of dictatorial regimes as tyrannies to be important. As Smith emphasises, citing Strauss, “to understand modern tyranny in its specific sense, it remains necessary to grasp ‘the elementary and in a sense natural form of tyranny which is premodern tyranny.’ The ancients still remain the best guide to understanding the moderns.” As he reaffirms elsewhere, “Strauss’ thesis was that modern terms such as fascism, totalitarianism, dictatorship, ‘Caesarism,’ and the like all failed to grasp the rudimentary phenomenon of tyranny.”

For Strauss, in accordance with its attempt to evacuate value, modern social science was at fault for its incapacity to clearly recognise tyrannous regimes; in Nasser Behnegar’s terms, “Strauss criticised present-day social science because it is not scientific, that is, because it denies what is known to common sense – namely, that tyranny is bad for political life.” This raises the question of how the term ‘tyranny’ functions in contrast to terms such as ‘dictatorship’ used in modern social science. The fundamental difference appears to be that while the modern terms pertain to a less value oriented meaning, tyranny is more evocative, generating a strong impulse of condemnation; while modern social science resists using terms which explicitly designate a value judgement, the ancient alternative does exactly this. Strauss’ condemnation of modern social science for this may rest upon his insistence that such value judgements are necessary for society; ‘common sense’

160 Strauss, What is Political Philosophy?, p. 95.
162 Smith, Reading Leo Strauss, p. 133.
understandings, and not ostensibly value-free social scientific terms ought to be in circulation, he suggests. This may imply that for Strauss, social science’s refusal to mobilise and rely upon common sense, i.e., social opinions, means that it fails to perform the function that the ancient concept of tyranny can; while social science’s more neutral terms fail to generate meaning by attempting to remove value judgements, the term ‘tyranny’ can help to construct precisely this by demarcating stable parameters of right and wrong, along the same conceptual lines as the friend/enemy dichotomy. What may be inferred from this is that Strauss’ rehabilitation of the term can be read as an attempt to generate meaning in order to counter the pernicious effects of the abyss left by the undermining of values which would otherwise have made the difference between a tyranny and non-tyranny appear perfectly clear. That no regime is inherently superior to any other can be obscured by the use of such terms as tyranny which designate, in the same manner and the friend/enemy dichotomy, morally clear and coherent categories.

To turn finally to the notion of justice as central to the generation of meaning in society, Strauss’ elucidation draws upon the discussion between Socrates and Thrasymachus in Plato’s *Republic*. In contrast to the ways in which this dialogue has traditionally been interpreted, Strauss put forward a new and controversial account of how Socrates sees the problem of justice in society. Following a discussion between Cephalus and Socrates, who are then joined by Polemarchus, regarding the nature and practice of justice, Thrasymachus enters the conversation. Thrasymachus is angry and hostile towards the other interlocutors, particularly towards Socrates, behaving “discourteously and even savagely: his entry into the debate is compared by so gentle a man as Socrates to a wild beast’s hurling itself upon him and Polemarchus as if he were about to tear them to pieces.” Strauss continues, it “seems entirely fitting that the most savage man present should maintain the most savage thesis on justice.”

Strauss suggests that in this exchange, the character of each of the contributors is reflective of their respective position; while Cephalus personifies the justice of the oligarch and Polemarchus the justice of the democrat, it seems that Thrasymachus represents “Injustice incarnate, the tyrant”; he is aggressive, rude, dismissive and greedy for money and prestige. However, Strauss instructs, we must not be too hasty in rejecting or dismissing Thrasymachus; while Plato makes it very easy for us to loathe Thrasymachus... there are other purposes to be considered. At any rate it is most important for the understanding of the *Republic* and generally that we should not behave towards Thrasymachus as Thrasymachus behaves, i.e. angrily, fanatically, or savagely.

Thrasymachus claims that justice consists in the advantage of the stronger, that “it is the other fellow’s good, i.e. good only for the receiver and bad for the giver; so far from being an art, it is folly; accordingly he praises injustice.” He argues that the private good is supremely just, that all apparently just acts are in reality only just in a secondary or instrumental way in the pursuit of selfish ends, i.e., just acts occur only instrumentally in the pursuit of unjust acts, so just acts are not choice-worthy for their own sake. Justice is, then, simply a means to an end, not an end it itself; it is impossible to praise justice without regard for its functions and consequences, and this, according to Strauss, is quietly conceded by Socrates a little later in the discussion. Indeed, Strauss argues that far from refuting the claims of Thrasymachus, Socrates agrees with him:

he adopts Thrasymachus’ principle: no one likes to serve or help others or act justly unless it is made profitable to him; the wise man seeks only his own good, not the other man’s good; justice in itself is bad.  

Socrates and Thrasymachus arrive at this conclusion in different ways. While Thrasymachus simply praises injustice because it is to his advantage, Socrates reaches it though the awareness that justice would only be realisable if it were possible to reconcile such antagonistic forces as individual and collective ends or if there were foundational or essential values upon which to ground a conception of justice; the tension between the pursuit of individual and collective ends is such that in any conception of justice one must be privileged over the other and such privileging is unfounded, hence true justice can never be reached in society. Such an intrinsically choice-worthy justice would only, Strauss claims, be possible in the perfect city, the city based on true philosophy. However, this city is impossible to realise; it can only exist as a philosophical ideal, the ideal of the coincidence of philosophy and politics:

The actualisation of the best regime depends on the coming together, on the coincidence of, things which have a natural tendency to move away from each other (e.g., on the coincidence of philosophy and political power)... The peculiar manner of... the best regime [is] its lacking actuality while being superior to all actual regimes.

The crux of the argument thus rests on the tendency of philosophy, understood as the pursuit of truth, and political association, understood as being grounded in belief, to exist in antagonism with each other. Because the two can never be reconciled in a real society, only as a philosophical idea, Socrates concedes that a justice which is choice-worthy for its own sake is impossible in society. This leads Strauss to conclude that the Republic is a dedicated critique of justice, it is “an ironic justification precisely of the adikia (unjust) – that comes

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166 Strauss, The City and Man, p. 74.
167 Strauss, The City and Man, p. 83.
168 Strauss, What is Political Philosophy?, pp. 34-5.
out beautifully in the Thrasymachus discussion,” in which justice “loses the trial, it wins only through the myth at the end, that is, though a kalon pseudo [beautiful lie], that is, through a deed that is strictly speaking adikon.” In other words, as a consequence of the abyss, justice is exposed in Strauss’ reading of this passage of the Republic as a myth, a beautiful lie, the exercise of which is not justifiable.

However, Strauss claims that one fundamental difference between Socrates and Thrasymachus remains. While the latter, in his demonstrative personification of injustice, deems justice an unnecessary artifice, the former maintains that although it is indeed an artifice, it is a vital one. It is necessary because justice “assigns to every citizen what is good for his soul and... determines the common good of the city.” This distinction is a crucial one because it shows why Thrasymachus would do away with any notion of justice in society while Socrates maintains it must be upheld as a salutary social opinion. In spite of the truth that an intrinsically choice-worthy justice is impossible, Socrates is aware, according to Strauss, that society fundamentally depends on a series of beliefs and values to survive. The idea of justice is one such value and as such generates meaning in society. As Lampert explains, “what Strauss’ extended account of Thrasymachus’s ‘downfall’ allows his reader to see – is that Socrates himself has a view of justice not unlike Thrasymachus’s and that Socrates is prudent enough not to flaunt it.”

Thus for Strauss the important aspect of justice is not its content or characteristics but rather its status as a publicly held standard which provides a point of reference for society; following Thrasymachus he maintains that justice is impossible but contends that its semblance is imperative because of its salutary social function. This is the reason why although Socrates concedes to Thrasymachus’ principle, he recognises that the latter must be tamed; Thrasymachus must be made to understand the dangers of publicly undermining such notions as justice because they are integral for the survival of society. Thus, while for Thrasymachus justice is simply an artifice, for Socrates it is a socially necessary artifice, a means by which to generate salutary social opinion.

Strauss asserts that “without “Thrasymachus’ there will never be a just city.” This statement can be understood in the context of the role the newly tamed Thrasymachus can play in society. Strauss claims that Thrasymachus “was a famous teacher of rhetoric,” and as such “he is the only man professing an art who speaks in the Republic.” As an artist of rhetoric, his skill lies in communicating with and persuading the masses of society. As has

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170 Strauss, The City and Man, p. 83.
171 Lampert, Leo Strauss and Nietzsche, pp. 149-150.
172 Strauss, The City and Man, p. 123.
173 Strauss, The City and Man, p. 80.
been shown, for Strauss certain salutary stories and myths are vital for society; as Lampert explains, while the city should ensure the “banishment of Homeric poetry, whose lies have been shown to be unsalutary because they tell of crimes at the origin of order, and of wars among the gods,” they should welcome the art of Thrasymachus who “stands for a new poetry directed by the philosopher and designed to persuade the multitude.” The philosopher can, in Lampert’s terms, ‘employ’ Thrasymachus by “showing [him] that his advantage is best served by making his art ministerial to philosophy.” Socrates and Thrasymachus thus “are mirror images of each other and as such require one another’s help... Each is a necessary component of justice,” a socially salutary justice created by the former and disseminated by the latter.

Elsewhere, Strauss discusses the notions of ‘philosophic conventionalism’ and ‘vulgar conventionalism’; these appear to correspond to the positions of Socrates and Thrasymachus respectively. Both agree that “by nature everyone seeks only his own good or that it is according to nature that one does not pay any regard to other people’s good or that the regard arises only out of convention.” Where they differ, he continues, is that “philosophic conventionalism denies that to pay no regard to others means to desire to have more than others or to be superior to others”; this it sees as “vain or opinion-bred.” Vulgar conventionalism, Strauss concludes, “owes its origin to a corruption of philosophic conventionalism,” and can be understood as the “life of the tyrant.” This would seem to imply, then, that a justice based on foundational or essential premises is impossible for Strauss but that the image of justice can be generated and disseminated through the interaction of philosophic and vulgar conventionalists, in short, that justice can be generated through creating the illusion of justice; the only justice possible is the creation of justice. As Strauss intimates, “the question of justice must be answered by all means even if all the evidence needed for an adequate answer is not in yet.” This is identical with the notion of justice of the tyrant, as the ‘will or reason of the strongest’; Strauss affirms this by stating that “Thrasymachus’ view, according to which the private good is supreme, triumphs.” The Nietzschean connotations of this are noted by Rosen: “Where there is no rank-ordering, power supervenes as the highest, and indeed as the only value.” Thus it would appear that justice amounts to a tyrannical impulse for Strauss; justice is defined as the domination of reason of the strongest which determines the nature of the regime.

174 Lampert, Leo Strauss and Nietzsche, p. 152.
175 Lampert, Leo Strauss and Nietzsche, p. 151.
176 Smith, Reading Leo Strauss, p. 98.
177 Strauss, Natural Right and History, p. 115.
178 Strauss, The City and Man, p. 106.
179 Strauss, The City and Man, p. 81.
All of this would seem to lead to the following conclusion: Strauss insists that societies must be closed and the friend/enemy dichotomy upheld as no natural justice exists between societies; opposition to external ideas and persons are the fundamental basis of politics. Concurrently, Strauss posits that a justice must be generated within the regime as no natural justice exists between persons even within society; the advantage of the stronger constitutes the semblance of justice given the impossibility of the latter. The abyss entails that universal or essential justice is impossible both between and within society for Strauss, it must, therefore, be generated within a closed group by referring to similarly generated external points of reference from which it can take its bearings.

However, it is worth briefly addressing a possible objection at this juncture. As we have seen, Strauss argues that essential or universal values are impossible, and that consequently, knowledge of the good or the just is impossible: “we cannot have any knowledge regarding the ultimate principles of our choices, i.e., regarding their soundness or unsoundness; our ultimate principles have no other support than our arbitrary and hence blind preferences.”181 This is because, he asserts, “no view of the whole, and in particular no view of the whole of human life, can claim to be final or universally valid.”182 Any claim to knowledge of inherently true values is, then, impossible and cannot be solved by appealing to any philosophical justification: “it is of the essence of these [philosophical] traditions that they cover or conceal their humble foundations by erecting impressive edifices on them.”183

In short,

it is admitted that we cannot refer to the true metaphysical and ethical teaching available in any of the great thinkers of the past. It is admitted that there are N ways of answering the fundamental questions, that there are N types of absolute presuppositions, as Collingwood called them, none of which can be said to be rationally superior to any other.184

In spite of this, however, some commentators have argued that far from accepting that attainment of foundational truths and values is impossible, Strauss shows how at least some individuals can ascend from opinion to truth. Thomas Pangle, for example, states that the empirical evidence that Strauss assembles in and through his meticulous textual interpretations proves... that a tiny minority of those writers whose books have come down to us... liberated their truest thinking and teaching entirely from the limitations of their particular historical contexts.185

181 Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, p. 4.
182 Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, p. 21.
183 Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, p. 31.
184 Strauss, “An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism”, p. 34.
Similarly, Villa notes Strauss’ “response to the ‘dogma’ of historicism is to dogmatically assert that the ‘natural order’ sought by Plato and Aristotle exists, and that we (armed with their texts and authority) can rediscover it.” Strauss’ texts do invite such a reading; he makes such statements as

the ‘experience of history’ does not make doubtful the view that the fundamental problems, such as the problem of justice, persist or retain their identity in all historical change, however much they may be obscured by the temporary denial of their relevance or however variable or provisional all human solutions to these problems may be.

These human solutions do not, Strauss claims, prove the impossibility of universal or foundational premises; he comments that “the mere fact of variety or mutability of ‘the just things’ or of the notions of justice does not warrant the rejection of natural right...” This may be because, he continues, this “lack of universal agreement can be explained by a corruption of human nature.” Strauss concludes from this that philosophy “consists, therefore, in the ascent from opinions to knowledge or to the truth, in an ascent that may be said to be guided by opinions.” Strauss argues here that opinions are not without significance, even if any particular one cannot be said to be inherently true or correct. In Strauss’ words, each of the contradictory opinions or visions of the whole “taken by itself, is merely an opinion of the whole or an inadequate articulation of the fundamental awareness of the whole,” yet each also “points beyond itself toward an adequate articulation.” Strauss claims here, then, the truth of these opinions resides not in their specific premises but rather in their addressing of an enduring and perhaps insoluble question, such as the problem of justice. Such truth can be approached if, he explains, we engage, following Socrates and his interlocutors, in “the art of conversation or friendly dispute.” The dialogue, then, can be read as the ascent towards true knowledge through the recognition of the contradictory charter of the opinions considered: “Recognizing the contradiction, one is forced to go beyond opinions toward the consistent view of the nature of the thing considered.” This, it seems, reflects Strauss’ own experience in reading the ancients; through his rediscovery of esotericism, they have provided him with a means by which to attain truth and knowledge of the good, to resist the implications of the abyss.

These statements of Strauss’ appear to stand in marked contrast and indeed tension with his countless other statements rejecting the possibility of an ascent from opinion to

186 Villa, Socratic Citizenship, p. 283.
187 Strauss, Natural Right and History, p. 32.
188 Strauss, Natural Right and History, pp. 97-98.
189 Strauss, Natural Right and History, p. 124.
190 Strauss, Natural Right and History, p. 125.
191 Strauss, Natural Right and History, p. 124.
192 Strauss, Natural Right and History, p. 124.
knowledge. Indeed, this tension forms the basis of a splintering of Strauss’ followers into two distinct schools of thought, which will be explored in detail in Chapter Two. There are several ways to account for this tension in Strauss’ thought, which are by no means mutually exclusive. The first of these is the possibility that Strauss’ claims relating to accession to knowledge of the whole amounts to his exoteric teaching; while privately he could not refute the historicist challenge, he took the lesson from Socrates about the importance of not undermining prevailing ideas about justice and its possibility very seriously. Villa offers such an explanation: “Strauss’s rhetoric – of timeless values... conceals... his actual or ‘esoteric’ teaching. Yet... he often cannot help giving his secret away, even to his less elite readers.”

Similarly, Larmore asks whether “his talk about recovering the idea of moral truth... [is a] mask, concealing a far bleaker view of human nature.”

In addition to the development of an exoteric teaching which protects the opinions of society, and not incompatibly, Strauss’ assertions might be read as an instance of self-exemption from the demands of his own logic. By this I intend to suggest that he relies upon something which is indefensible by his own standards. According to Rosen, “Strauss is forced to defend philosophy, which for him is indefensible in its own terms, by turning to the prephilosophic situation.” However, this too is inaccessible. He is, then, forced to defend things which his own position renders indefensible. This self-exemption may be done consciously, not to say calculatingly, in the service of the development of his exoteric salutary teaching that opinions can lead to knowledge about the good. As Rosen notes, “the turn to the prephilosophical has utility for the philosophical construction of an exoteric political philosophy. And this is precisely the use to which Strauss, in my opinion, puts such a turn.” It also may be a consequence of his own will to mitigate the implications of the abyss, the foundationless condition he finds himself in. This may imply that Strauss creates for himself precisely that which he bids the regime create for its citizens; he self-exempts from his own logic in order to develop something which will secure him from the unsettling and all encompassing dangers of the abyss. This suggestion points towards what I read to be an underlying fear residing at the heart of Strauss’ political philosophy.

Strauss’ project can be read, I would argue, as an attempt to secure against the consequences of the moderns’ exposure of the abyss. Lampert posits that “the most severe criticism of Strauss from a Nietzschean perspective must be that he understood the Nietzschean moment in our history but failed to flaunt it, to become its reasoned advocate.” Lampert attributes this to Strauss’ “lack of boldness on behalf of philosophy at a decisive

195 Rosen, “Leo Strauss and the Quarrel between the Ancients and moderns,” p. 162.
moment in history.” He suggests that this may have been because “Strauss saw still less reason than did Nietzsche for any hope and therefore prepared as he thought best for the coming night...”\(^{197}\) However, Strauss can also be read and, I would submit, more convincingly, as actively seeking a way out of the abyssal encounter. He comments:

All rational liberal philosophic positions have lost their significance and power. One may deplore this, but I for one cannot bring myself to clinging to philosophic positions which have been shown to be inadequate.\(^{198}\)

That he ‘deplores’ reason being compromised and undermined shows his apprehension about this state of affairs; he is clearly reluctant to accept this but cannot do otherwise. Similarly, he comments that the challenges posed by existentialism cannot be fought off by “poor and stupid positivism”, and that “we do not have a rational philosophy which takes up the thread where science and positivism drop it, and for which existentialism is no match. I have looked for a long time...”\(^{199}\) Here his admission that he has searched for such a rationally based position indicates again his will to rebuke or combat the implications of existentialist insights. Strauss thus confesses that he sought to counteract the relativising consequences of the abyss, that he was still “inclined to sit at the feet of the old philosophers”\(^{200}\) and that he was determined to encourage “those among us who believe in the Western tradition, we Westerners... [to] rally around the flag of the Western tradition.”\(^{201}\) It would seem then that Strauss was not prepared to allow reason to be completely sacrificed and swallowed up by relativism, and it was his purpose to attempt to find some way out of this. According to Leora Batnitzky, Strauss’ resistance to the implications of the abyss was political as well as philosophical; he sought to “investigate why there was no adequate rational, moral response to the rise of National Socialism,” and why neither “modern political philosophy, theology, nor philosophy had the critical resources to respond to the disintegration of the liberal state...”\(^{202}\) In order to resist such regimes and disintegration, Strauss, it appears, advocated the generation of meaning; in resistance to the abyss opened up by historicism, he advocated a counter-move designed to mitigate its effects. His fear is demonstrated in his statement that:

Once we realize that the principles of our actions have no other support than our blind choice, we really do not believe them any more. We cannot wholeheartedly act upon them any more. We cannot live any more as responsible beings... the more we

\(^{197}\) Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche*, p. 184.


\(^{199}\) Strauss, “An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism,” p. 34.

\(^{200}\) Strauss, “An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism,” p. 34.


cultivate reason, the more we cultivate nihilism: the less we are able to be loyal members of society.203

In other words, Strauss offered ways through which meaning could be generated in society in order to combat these pernicious effects of reason: he provided his readers with the insight that opinion is the element of society that can be generated by the superior man in the context of a regime that closes itself to and designates an enemy which lies outside its boundaries. It is my contention that such processes of opinion formation reside at the heart of the Straussian interventions relating to the invasion of Iraq. Before exploring this, however, the inheritors of these Straussian concerns require identification and discussion.

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203 Strauss, Natural Right and History, p. 6.
Chapter Two

The Strausians

Introduction

There has been considerable disagreement regarding the question of Straussian presence and influence in the recent Bush administration. Such debate spans several questions including the existence of a coherent Straussian group, the impact of such a group, the question of a divide between more ‘philosophical’ Strausians active in the academy and more ‘political’ ones in and close to the policy making establishment, and the splintering of the Strausians into East and West Coast factions. These concerns will be addressed here, and an argument positing their interconnectedness and influence made. This chapter addresses Costopolous’ insistence noted in the Introduction that any challenge to the Strausians must demonstrate their existence as a group and what they inherited from Strauss, positing that Strauss’ preoccupation with the implications of the abyss underpins the political thought of the Strausians, specifically in terms of securing against it through the creation and dissemination of socially salutary opinions.

In order to do address these questions, the interventions of eight individuals will be explored; while accounts hitherto have simply referred to or denied the existence of a Straussian presence, this study will provide detailed discussion of the interrelations, publications, and interventions of these eight, demonstrating their close connection to one another and Strauss’ thought. It will be shown that the Strausians share their teacher’s concern with the relativism of the modern condition and that they look back to the ancients for a means by which to offset this. Their solution follows Strauss in advocating the construction of opinions masquerading as truth, and Strauss’ concern with the Schmittean friend/enemy binary, the regime, with its focus on tyranny, and justice as the reason of the strongest. It argues that the attempt to instil such opinion amounts to the attempt to secure against the abyss through the imposition of totalising narratives through which the unsettling abyssal encounter might be offset.
The Straussian

According to Smith, “from around 1955... a self-conscious school of ‘Straussians’ began to take shape.” 1 Stephan Halper and Jonathan Clarke explain that, as “Irving Kristol observed in 1995, Strauss’s original students had produced another generation of political theorists who chose to relocate in Washington.” 2 This school thus now comprises several generations, the first of which were taught directly by Strauss, and those that came later, by Strauss and his previous students. Due to the importance of detail and specificity, and the focus of this study, not all of these individuals can be discussed here. 3 My identification of the particular individuals focused upon here as Straussian follows two criteria: they themselves have self-identified as Straussian, and Strauss’ ideas, preoccupations, and terminologies are clearly discernable in their writings, speeches and interviews. 4

One of the most popularly acclaimed Straussians is Allan Bloom, due in large part to the success of his book The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education has failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students. Bloom studied with Strauss at the University of Chicago, obtaining his Ph.D. in 1955 and went on to teach primarily at Cornell and Chicago. During his academic career he taught widely; Zuckert and Zuckert assert that Bloom was a masterful teacher, perhaps the student of Strauss who had the most success himself as a teacher. He produced wave after wave of students who went on to work with Strauss, or who received their PhDs under his direction. He was clearly a pied piper, an extraordinarily gifted teacher. 5

At Cornell, Bloom was master of Telluride House, a college house in which he lived for a time, which became renowned for the close relationship he had with his students. As Anne Norton states, Telluride House revolved around Allan Bloom... Other Straussians, even at Cornell, looked askance at the intensity of the master-disciple relation, calling Bloom’s students ‘the blossoms’. Telluride had the hothouse atmosphere of cultic discipleship and dissident conservatism. Bloom held his students to a conservative orthodoxy. He also held them in a particularly intense form of discipleship. 6

1 Smith, “Leo Strauss: The Outlines of a Life,” p. 34.
2 Halper and Clarke, America Alone, p. 67-68.
3 A more extensive list of Straussians is offered but not defended in Zuckert and Zuckert, The Truth about Leo Strauss, p. 29.
4 While six of the eight unproblematically self-identify as Straussian, in two cases this is less the case. In these two instances, further discussion of and justification for their inclusion will be provided.
In Lewis Solomon's words, “the charismatic Bloom quickly developed a network of undergraduate students.” Significantly, he continues:

> At dinner or in the basement of the Telluride House, the young professor conducted hours-long, informal Socratic dialogues, mixing debate with jokes and gossip. Bloom was spellbinding; he was Socrates incarnate.\(^7\)

Bloom was, then, centrally significant in the education, both in the sense of their formal studies and also the broader development of many who consequently became Straussian until his death in 1992.

A second influential Straussian is Harry V. Jaffa, one of Strauss’ first students whom he taught at the New School for Social Research in New York. Jaffa’s encounter with Strauss began there in September 1944, where the former earned his Ph.D. He is currently Professor Emeritus of Government at the Claremont Graduate School. Jaffa’s research has been focused on the American Founding and the development of the ‘regime’, in particular the study of the debates between Lincoln and Douglas in his book, *Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates*. This text, like the long awaited second part of the study of Lincoln entitled *A New Birth of Freedom*, relates the issues discussed to broader themes of justice and statesmanship in a distinctively Straussian fashion, as will be explored further below. As well as a long career teaching and a number of books published on the subjects of political philosophy, Shakespeare, and the American founding and regime, Jaffa was heavily involved in the Barry Goldwater Presidential campaign, writing the controversial 1964 nomination acceptance speech which stated that “extremism in defense of liberty is no vice; moderation in pursuit of justice is no virtue.”\(^8\) As Charles Kesler explains, Jaffa has a combative tendency which has resulted in “renowned, often acerbic, disputes with his closest philosophical and political friends, including many fellow students of Leo Strauss.”\(^9\) These rifts culminated in the establishment of the so-called West Coast Straussian school, which continues to be headed by Jaffa.

A further influential Straussian is Harvey C. Mansfield. He holds the position of William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of Government at Harvard University, having been a faculty member since 1962, and continues to teach in the field of political philosophy. Strauss’

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\(^8\) Zuckert and Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss*, p. 197.

influence on him began, he states, in 1953, although it was later that the two actually met.10 His scholarly work includes a book entitled *Manliness*, within which he argues for ‘common sense’ or ‘stereotypical’ distinctions between the sexes and attacks feminism and feminists for attempting undermine the attitudes of women who “still rather like housework [and] changing diapers,”11 which is fortunate because “men look down on women’s work... not because they think it is dirty or boring or insignificant...; they look down on it because it is women’s.”12 This is because, he claims, “manliness prevents men from giving equal honor to women.”13 As this might suggest, Mansfield has a reputation for being one of the more outspoken and politicised of the East Coast Straussians. As Norton comments, he considers himself a ‘conservative activist’; as such he “baits and battles leftists and liberals,” and he insists that his students adhere to his views: “If you want to study with Mansfield you are expected to be a conservative as well. If you are not, you are sent to study with someone else.”14 He received a National Humanities Medal from President Bush in 2004.

The later generations of Straussians began their careers in the universities where the first generation and Strauss himself taught. The first and perhaps most well known of these is former Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz. The degree to which Wolfowitz can be described as a Straussian has been a point of contention; while critics such as Drury and Norton identify him as belonging to this group,15 and Jeane Kirkpatrick stated in 2002 that “Wolfowitz is still a leading Straussian,”16 Minowitz claims, in contrast, that according to Francis Fukuyama, Wolfowitz “never regarded himself as a Strauss protégé,” and that he was “much more heavily influenced by Wohlstetter,”17 his Ph.D. supervisor. According to Solomon, Wolfowitz himself asserted on the matter that “I don’t particularly like the [Straussian] label, because I don’t like labels that much.”18 Minowitz concedes that he can be identified as a “Straussian ‘in recovery,’”19 and that he “exited early in the journey”20 to becoming a Straussian; that he may not have realised the entire process does not entail that he was not influenced by it, as both his education and subsequent interventions demonstrate.

13 Mansfield, *Manliness*, p. 15
16 Cited in Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, p. 28.
18 Solomon, *Paul D. Wolfowitz*, p. 13. Whether this implies a dislike of the Straussian label in particular or labels more generally is unclear.
Wolfowitz studied mathematics as an undergraduate at Cornell, where he lived at Telluride House, the campus house where Bloom lived and operated from 1963, and it was here that a close relationship between Bloom and Wolfowitz began, the former having been described as Wolfowitz’s “mentor.” In Solomon’s estimation, Wolfowitz demonstrated an “intellectual devotion to Bloom,” although he was never a “blind follower.” Bloom’s influence on him was sufficiently great, however, for him to apply graduate school to study not mathematics but political science and international relations, against the wishes of his father. James Mann notes that when he was accepted at both Harvard and Chicago, Wolfowitz chose the latter. Mann explains that “one of the key factors [for this decision] was that Leo Strauss was teaching there. Wolfowitz thought Strauss was a unique figure, an irreplaceable asset. He wanted to know more about him.” Once he had arrived at Chicago, Wolfowitz took two classes with Strauss, focusing on Plato and Montesquieu but did not have the opportunity to study with him for long as Strauss retired from teaching shortly thereafter. Wolfowitz embarked on a Ph.D. at Chicago, which he completed in 1972, focusing on the topic of the dangers of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, a subject which Mann suggests “consumed much of Wolfowitz’s own time and energy for the next three decades.”

It was shortly before this time that Wolfowitz became involved with an organisation run by the Cold War hawks Dean Acheson and Paul Nitze called the Committee to Maintain a Prudent Defense Policy, in Washington. In 1973, Wolfowitz was offered a job in the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and moved to Washington where most of his working life has subsequently been spent. He became increasingly influential during this period, including becoming one of the ten members of ‘Team B’, an organisation set up during the Cold War to review the intelligence gathering practices of the CIA, the conclusions of which were that the latter institution “was not being sceptical enough” about the actions and intentions of the Soviet Union. Although most of his career has been spent in Washington, Wolfowitz has maintained connection with the academic world; as Mann suggests, he can be deemed to have “served as a bridge between academia and government,” holding positions at Yale for a short period following the completion of his Ph.D., and later as Visiting Professor at the John Hopkins School for Advanced Research in 1980-81, and again as Dean between 1994 and 2001. He also maintained strong links with his academic mentors, especially with Bloom, with whom it has been suggested he had regular communication. According to Saul Bellow’s novel based on Allan Bloom, what the protagonist “loved was to have the men he

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had trained appointed to important positions; real life confirming his judgements."

Wolfowitz seems to corroborate this tendency of Bloom’s, stating that he “loved to talk to any students of his who were in government, and even though I wasn’t his closest student I was probably one at the highest level in government so it gave him the most bragging rights.”

While this demonstrates his embedness in Straussian circles, it is Wolfowitz’s publications and speeches which serve to situate him firmly within this group, as will be demonstrated below.

Almost as prominent as Wolfowitz is the editor of the *Weekly Standard* and one of the two founders of the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), William Kristol. Kristol studied with Mansfield at Harvard University, completing his Ph.D. in 1976. Like Wolfowitz, Kristol has bridged the gap between the academic and political realms, holding an assistant professorship in the early 1980s at Harvard and serving in the Department of Education in 1985, thereafter serving in the Republican Party, becoming William Bennett’s chief of staff and later dubbed ‘Dan Quayle’s brain’. Since the mid-1980s, according to Jon Meacham, he

quickly shed any academic reserve and executed famous conservative blitzes - with Bennett, against the education establishment; with Quayle, against "the cultural elite"; and, with both, against supposed enemies of family values, including the media, Hollywood, and liberals in general.29

Kristol became one of the most important strategists for the Republican Party, being described as “the most learned and intelligent political advocate the Republicans have had in a long, long time.”30 His main platform for publication is the *Weekly Standard*, which he established in 1995 and continues to edit it; this magazine has provided him with a means by which to regularly comment publicly on current political events. Many of the Straussians commented upon here have published articles in the *Standard*, which became popular reading in government circles has during the Bush administration’s years in office. He has also published a number of books, often co-authored with similarly minded non-Straussian conservatives, including *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Polity* in 2000, and *The War over Iraq: Saddam’s Tyranny and America’s Mission* in 2003. As these titles suggest, Kristol has been a long term advocate of an aggressive and interventionist US foreign policy. His activism can be seen in his establishment of a think

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29 Meacham, “The GOP’s Master Strategist”.
30 R. Emmett Tyrrell of *The American Spectator*, cited in Meacham, “The GOP’s Master Strategist”.

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tank named The Project for a Republican Future which he headed during the mid 1990s, and more recently his co-founding with Robert Kagan of PNAC in 1997.

A third notable Straussian of the later generation is Abram Shulsky. Shulsky became involved with Cornell’s Telluride House, the college house headed by Bloom and where Wolfowitz also roomed, becoming close to both, and also studied with Strauss at Chicago. Shulsky has operated in the realm of intelligence production for most of his working life, bringing Strauss’ teaching and ideas to the intelligence field, and has written on the subject of the advantages of Strauss’ approach when applied to this sphere, publishing a widely read article entitled “Leo Strauss and the World of Intelligence (By which we do not mean Nous)” with fellow Straussian Gary Schmitt. As Mann notes, Shulsky carried the implications of Strauss’s theories into the field of intelligence gathering. The Straussians argued that the analytic style of the CIA, developed by the Yale history professor Sherman Kent, had been intrinsically linked to the academic tradition of liberalism. Shulsky has frequently co-published with a further prominent Straussian of the later generations, Francis Fukuyama. Fukuyama’s inclusion represents the second of the two instances of the designation of ‘Straussian’ wherein further justification is required. While not perhaps immediately associated with Straussianism, he can indeed be seen to be part of this group; as Minowitz emphasises that he has “abundant firsthand knowledge of Straussians.” Like Wolfowitz and Shulsky, Fukuyama was connected to Telluride House of Cornell University, and was taught by Bloom. He completed his Ph.D. at Harvard and has remained for most of his career in the academy, holding positions in the George Mason University of Fairfax, Virginia and, more recently, at the John Hopkins University. His major works include the highly influential and widely read *The End of History and the Last Man*, a lengthy book which has a distinctively Straussian tone, as will be shown below. He has an especially close relationship with Shulsky, whom he mentions in the ‘Acknowledgements’ in *The End of History*, stating that the

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31 Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, p. 28. Shulsky’s critique of these methods will be explored in detail below.
32 Francis Fukuyama and Abram Shulsky, *The ‘Virtual Corporation’ and Army Organisation* (Santa Monica; Washington: Rand, 1997).
33 Minowitz, *Straussophobia*, p. 22.
present volume has profited enormously from conversations and readings by a number of colleagues. Most important of these has been Abram Shulsky, who will find many of his ideas and insights recorded here.\footnote{Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London; New York; Camberwell; Toronto; New Delhi; Auckland; Rosebank: Penguin, 1992), p. ix.}

In addition, he has strong connections with Wolfowitz whom, Mann states, “began nurturing his own group of protégés, young conservatives whom he brought into government, such as Cheney’s chief of staff, Scooter Libby, and the scholar Francis Fukuyama.”\footnote{Mann, *The Rise of the Vulcans*, p. 22.}

Finally, Gary Schmitt is a significant Straussian. Schmitt completed his Ph.D. at Chicago in 1980 and is a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, which he joined following his time as Executive Director of PNAC from its inception in 1997 until its cessation of activities in 2005. Like many of the other Straussians, his career has included involvement in the academy, think tanks, and the political establishment; Schmitt was an Adjunct Professor in Advanced International Studies at John Hopkins University between 1996 and 1997, a US Defense Department Consultant in 1992-93, and was involved with the Brookings Institution, and the National Strategy information Centre between 1988 and 1996. He has also had extensive dealings with Kristol’s *Weekly Standard*, publishing several articles, and has co-authored texts with Shulsky on questions of intelligence analysis.

The Signifier ‘Straussian’

The possibility of referring to a group under the term ‘Straussian’ has been subject to debate. That they might be considered a coherent faction has been denied by Zuckert and Zuckert, for instance, on the grounds that the divisions between the ‘academic’ Straussians and the ‘political’ Straussians, and between the East and West Coast schools, entail that no unitary group of Straussians exists. In the case of the academic/political distinction they allow that Strauss enjoys “an undeniably large presence even now, more than thirty years after his death, in the study of the history of political philosophy.”\footnote{Zuckert and Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss*, p. 29.} They elaborate on this, asserting that “there is a thriving ‘school’ of Platonic studies influenced by Strauss,” that Straussian studies on Machiavelli have become prominent, as well as the study of medieval, early modern and later modern, especially German, philosophy in a manner inspired by Strauss.\footnote{Zuckert and Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss*, p. 29} However, they insist that while this group exists in the academy, no such network is
discernable in the political sphere: “in the tendency to see a Straussian under every bed in Washington there is at work an optical illusion of sorts.” They have consequently argued that the label ‘Straussian’ should be withheld from the Straussians in government:

The fact that some of those in Washington who have been involved with Bush policy once studied with Strauss or with students of Strauss, or once knew someone who shook hands with a cousin of someone who studied with Strauss, is not a sufficient reason to identify that person as ‘Straussian’ or to connect his or her policies and political activities with Strauss.38

Similarly, as Xenos argues, Norton seeks to distinguish between the authentic students of Strauss who remained in the academy and those ‘lesser’ Straussians who became involved in politics, again asserting that the latter group are not authentic Straussians because “she sees nothing in Strauss’s or in her own teachers’ writings or approaches to texts that are inherently political in the partisan sense.”39

Similar reservations have been voiced regarding the relationship between the East and West Coast Straussians; it has been suggested that a fundamental division between these groups exists by, for instance, Zuckert and Zuckert, who quote a prominent East Coast Straussian as stating in reference to Jaffa, the founder of the West Coast school, “who will rid us of this pest of a priest?”41 The East Coast Straussians, it has been argued, are more ‘philosophical’, emphasising the philosophical dimensions of Strauss’ work at the expense of his ‘political’ project, offering critiques of the degraded condition of American culture and life from the 1960s onwards. The West Coast school was founded by Jaffa as a response to what he deemed to be the overly extensive criticism of the US regime by the East Coast school. The West Coast Straussians are more overtly political according to Norton, who asserts that they “are prone to zealous partisanship in politics and the academy... They are regarded as vehement and ideological, even by fellow conservatives, and they are unabashedly partisan.”42 The major division between them is that while the East coast school mounts critique against the US regime, based as it is on the inferior ‘modern’ philosophy of Locke, Jaffa and the West Coast school attempt to deny this modern founding by ‘Aristoteleanising’ Locke, in order to elevate the US regime to the superior status of ‘ancient’ as opposed to the inferior and flawed ‘modern’ project. This might imply, then, that the divisions which developed within the Straussian movement might undermine the extent to which they can be deemed influential or coherent under the signifier ‘Straussian’.

38 Zuckert and Zuckert, The Truth about Leo Strauss, p. 264.
40 See Xenos, Cloaked in Virtue, p. 12.
41 Zuckert and Zuckert, The Truth about Leo Strauss, p. 239.
42 Norton, Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire, p. 8.
In order to challenge the notion that these differences preclude reference to ‘Straussians’, at least two arguments can be made. On the one hand, the relationship between Strauss and those who follow him suggests that these individuals are bound together by this at least, and on the other hand, their professional dealings with one another pertains to their being interconnected, even if not immune from internal disputes. This is by no means an assertion that no differences among Straussians exist, but rather to claim that, at least among the Straussians discussed here, boundaries of political and academic, and East and West coast do not preclude reference to the signifier ‘Straussian’.

To address the first argument, the Straussians discussed here are all similarly explicit regarding their indebtedness to and respect for Strauss. For example, in the preface to his book *Giants and Dwarfs, Essays 1960-1990*, Bloom states that

the decisive moment of... [my] life was the encounter with Leo Strauss... I finally learned from that great man the self-actualization depended on seeing what the human possibilities are and that they live in flesh and blood in old books.\(^{43}\)

As Walter Niegorski relays, Jaffa similarly posited that “Strauss’s words and Strauss’s thoughts echo and re-echo” through Bloom’s *Closing of the American Mind*.\(^{44}\) Concurrently, Jaffa gave an account of Strauss’ impact on his own thinking, describing the “blinding light that emanated from Strauss himself.” He continues:

I have often compared my encounter with Strauss, beginning in September 1944 to the experience of Saul on the road to Damascus. When one is in that kind of exalted consciousness, it is easy to neglect or dismiss other prophets (or to assume without inquiring that they must be false prophets!).\(^{45}\)

In a similar vein, Mansfield has stated that Strauss was for him centrally important. When asked in an interview about how much he had been influenced by Strauss, he replied:

Very greatly, and I have very, very great admiration for Strauss and for what he’s done to teach us all the importance of political philosophy and why it stands as the crucial subject to be studied by anyone or everyone at any time.\(^{46}\)

In addition, Kristol has praised Strauss’ work and ideas, commenting that

his extraordinary body of work makes Strauss more than just one learned voice among many in scholarly debates... Indeed, it is no doubt some vague sense of


\(^{45}\) Jaffa, “Strauss at One Hundred,” in Deutsch and Murley (eds.) *Leo Strauss, the Straussians and the American Regime*, p. 41.

Strauss’s status as a thinker that has aroused so much passion both in and out of the academy. His thought is of such a character that it defies indifference.47

Concurrently, many of the Strausians discussed here have dedicated their publications to Strauss or acknowledged him. Bloom and Jaffa’s Shakespeare’s Politics is dedicated “to Leo Strauss, our teacher,” while Jaffa dedicates his Equality and Liberty to Strauss and states in the preface to Crisis of the House Divided, “let me mention first of all Leo Strauss... He is and was my teacher, in a sense now archaic but not less vital for being old.”48 What this shows is that there is little discernable difference or disagreement between ‘political’ and ‘philosophical’ Strausians, or those of the East or West coast schools, regarding the impact Strauss made on their lives and work.

To take the second argument, it is clear that a good deal of cooperation and collaboration has occurred between all of the Strausians discussed here. There are numerous collections in which their work appears together, including the academic works such as History of Political Philosophy, which includes contributions from Strauss, Bloom, and Mansfield. There is a good deal of evidence to show that ‘philosophical’ Strausians within the academy, for instance, Bloom (until his death), Mansfield, and Jaffa from the first generation and Fukuyama from later generations, have strong connections with those ‘political’ Strausians who have taken up positions within and surrounding the political establishment in the US, including Kristol, Shulsky and Wolfowitz. The volume entitled The Weekly Standard: A Reader: 1995 – 2005, for instance, shows the cooperation outside the formal academic sphere; it is a collection of articles originally written for Kristol’s publication and includes multiple contributions by Mansfield. In addition, in a collection entitled Essays on the Closing of the American Mind, many prominent Strausians respond to the ideas and issues raised by Bloom’s best-selling book, including commentaries by Kristol, Mansfield, Jaffa and Bloom. As well as this, a collection of papers and articles put together with the express intention of honouring Strauss’ legacy in 1999, entitled Leo Strauss, the Strausians and the American Regime, contains material by Jaffa and Shulsky, and includes a section called “The First Generation,” which celebrates the work of Bloom and Jaffa, in addition to others. Concurrently, many works have been co-authored by Strausians, including Bloom and Jaffa’s Shakespeare’s Politics, and Shulsky and Fukuyama’s The ‘Virtual Corporation’ and Army Organisation.

Many Strausians themselves have commented upon their interrelatedness and their approval of one another’s work. For instance, Mansfield says of Bloom’s Closing of the

47 Steven Lenzner and William Kristol, “What was Leo Strauss up to?” The Public Interest, No. 153 (Fall 2003), pp. 19-39.
*American Mind* that “its intelligence, its range, its brilliance, its passion – were obvious...”

Similarly, Kristol states in the same volume:

> No other recent book so brilliantly knits together such astute perceptions of the contemporary scene with such depths of scholarship and philosophical learning. No other book combines such shrewd insights into our current state with so radical and fundamental critique of it. No other book is at once so lively and so deep, so witty and so thoughtful, so outrageous and so sensible, so amusing and so chilling.

Fukuyama appears to concur, stating that it “directly and brilliantly connected Heidegger’s *Rektoratsrede* with the contemporary crisis... [It] touched a raw nerve and identified a real problem.”

What this shows it that not only is it clear that Straussians within the academy have cooperated but also that those outside the academy, those who embarked on careers in politics, also interrelate with those in the academic realm; the ‘political’ Shulsky and the ‘academic’ Fukuyama have worked closely together, as have the ‘political’ Kristol and the ‘academic’ Mansfield.

As regards the distinction between the East and West Coast Straussians, similar cooperation and connections are discernable. East and West Coast Straussians are deeply involved in one another’s work; although Bloom and Jaffa were in more general agreement in 1964 when their Shakespeare book was published, their work and ideas were still of singular concern to each other thereafter, as Jaffa’s very detailed response to *The Closing of the American Mind* in the *Essays* collection shows. Similarly, Jaffa’s work has been utilised and built upon by East Coast Straussians, for instance, Mansfield asserts that Bloom “relies on the scholarship of other Straussians, especially... Harry Jaffa, on the American founding.”

Similarly, Jaffa praises Bloom’s book, stating that he “preaches, and does it very well,” that “he is certainly correct about relativism seducing young women,” and that he “speaks eloquently and even wisely of the evils of relativism.” In addition to this, East and West Coast Straussians have asserted that they are connected, for instance Mansfield stating in an interview that “Harry Jaffa is a great friend of mine, and I wouldn’t want to say anything against him.”

This is not to assert that there are not disagreements between the two schools; Jaffa’s commentary on Bloom’s book includes some noteworthy criticisms. Yet

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51 Francis Fukuyama, *After the Neocons: America at the Crossroads* (London: Profile Books, 2006), p. 23. The engagement with endorsement of Bloom’s book by the Straussians is important here as it will be drawn upon below in some detail.


54 Mansfield, “Q&A: Harvey Mansfield Talks ‘Manliness’”.

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these disagreements do not undermine the existence of a coherent Straussian group; that they respond to one another in such detail and publish together in volumes wherein their work appears side by side suggests this.

Thus, while Zuckert and Zuckert assert that the connections between the academic and political Straussian groups are overstated and that the relationships between East and West Coast Straussian are fraught with divisions and disagreements, the above exploration shows that the Straussians have and continue to work together and cooperate; both the more ‘academic’ and ‘political’ Straussian groups and the Straussians of the East and West Coasts publish side by side and respond explicitly to one another’s work. Norton seems to confirm this when she states: “Straussians know who each other’s teachers are, who went to school with whom, and whom they taught in turn.”55 As regards the academic/political divide, this might be because, as the list of the Straussians to be considered in this study shows, the distinction between the academic and political Straussian is at least in part a misnomer because all of the Straussians mentioned here began their careers in the academy, hence all of them can be considered ‘academic’, even those who left following the completion of their Ph.Ds. In this sense, it might be claimed that to be a Straussian entails being ‘academic’; those who became Straussians were picked firstly by Strauss himself and later by the first generation of his students to be taught the Straussian modes of study precisely because of their academic prowess and their political beliefs. As shown above, many of the apparently more political Straussians mentioned still have ties to particular universities, including Wolfowitz and Shulsky.

Similarly, the converse is true. Those Straussians who have stayed in the academy are by no means a- or non-political. In addition to the broader point that a designated apolitical realm seems highly problematic, the Straussians discussed here have all enacted explicitly political interventions, as Norton’s account of Jaffa’s baiting of the left shows, as does the publication of non-academic texts for think-tank or popular consumption, for instance, Bloom’s best seller, Mansfield’s account of the virtues of ‘manliness’, and his support for the Iraq war,56 Fukuyama’s popular and highly politicised End of History and the Last Man and his cooperation with Shulsky for the Rand Corporation’s Virtual Corporations study. This may suggest that to be a Straussian is necessarily to be both ‘political’ and ‘philosophical’; Strauss was after all a scholar and teacher of political philosophy. As Lenzner and Kristol confirm, Strauss’ writings were politically oriented:

55 Norton, Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire, p. 32.
Strauss elsewhere characterizes the classical writers as being ‘for almost all practical purposes what now are called conservatives.’ And if one considers Strauss’s apparent preference for the classics, one can see why Strauss once remarked that his teaching was held to be ‘in the odour of conservatism’.57

Having demonstrated the interconnectedness of these individuals such that the signifier ‘Straussian’ may be employed, it remains to address Costolpoulos’ question of what specifically these individuals inherited from their teacher.

The Politics of Straussianism

As Chapter One showed, Strauss’ political thought was informed by a perceived ‘Crisis of the West’, which was manifest socio-culturally, in the social sciences, and in philosophy. This concern resides at the heart of the Straussians’ works. Bloom, for example, claims that the crisis is a reflection of the problem that “the West had been demythologised and had lost its power to inspire and its view to the future.”58 This suggests that Bloom, like Strauss, understood the crisis to be related to the West’s loss of raison d’etre. Fukuyama seems to concur with Bloom here, asserting that “it is possible to speak of historical progress only if one knows where mankind is going. Most nineteen-century Europeans thought that progress meant progress toward democracy.” But, he continues,

for most of this century, there has been no consensus on this question. Liberal democracy was challenged by two major rival ideologies – fascism and communism – which offered radically different visions of a good society. People in the West themselves came to question whether liberal democracy was in fact a general aspiration of all mankind, and whether their earlier confidence that it was did not reflect a narrow ethnocentrism on their part... they came to question the universality of their own ideals [because]... there seemed to be as many goals as there were peoples or civilizations, with liberal democracy having no particular privilege among them.59

This seems to suggest that the crisis springs, for Fukuyama too, from the loss of direction, certainty, and identity in the West itself rather than from the threat posed in the Cold War; it reflected, in Fukuyama’s words, the “suicidal self-destructiveness of the European state

57 Lenzner and Kristol, “What was Leo Strauss up to?”, p.29.
58 Bloom, The Closing of the American Mind, p. 204.
This implies that the crisis originated within the West itself rather than being caused by an external challenge, the encounter with the Soviet bloc merely illustrating and making manifest a pre-existing condition. The inherent inability of the West to respond adequately to the threat of Soviet communism indicates, they claim, the underlying cause of the political dimension of the crisis.

Along with this political element of the crisis, the Straussian, following Strauss, identify a manifestation of the crisis in the realm of modern social science. In Strauss’ words, modern social science “fiddles while Rome burns,” although “it does not know that it fiddles, and it does not know that Rome burns.” Strauss asserted that the fact/value distinction of the mid-twentieth century social science is a fundamentally erroneous premise; Bloom seems to agree, claiming that the distinction amounts to “the suicide of science.” Similarly, Jaffa claims that “in the discipline of political science, a distinction was made between normative theory, which dealt with ‘values,’ and empirical theory, which dealt with facts.” It was, he continues, “thought to be a delusion, however, to believe that one might actually arrive at a judgement as to whether a government was or was not legitimate by examining whether that government was or was not in accordance with the laws of nature.”

In a similar vein, Bloom develops Strauss’ objection to the fact/value distinction in Weber’s work, arguing that the latter “lived in an atmosphere of permanent tragedy [because of] the very precarious, not to say imaginary, distinction between facts and values.” The attempt to separate fact and value has led, the Straussian claim, to a compounding of the crisis to the extent that social science no longer studies the most important questions; without value judgments, Jaffa argues, “any social science seems necessarily impotent.” Jaffa illustrates this point, arguing that because there is no scientific basis upon which to make moral judgements, modern anthropologists, for instance, “may deny the Nazis’

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60 Fukuyama, *The End of History*, p. 7. The notion of the suicide of the West is noteworthy here, as it is in Bloom’s comment in the following paragraph, and will be discussed in detail in Part II of the thesis in the context of Derrida’s notion of ‘autoimmunity’.  
assertions as to the inequality of races, by denying or criticising any positive evidence that the Nazi ‘scientists’ may bring forward...” However, the anthropologists in question, he continues, “cannot and do not contest the right of Nazis to be Nazis. They do not say that one ought not to be a Nazi, and that the Nazi’s treatment of their enemies is morally wrong.”67 This concern with the accession of Nazism as a consequence of the exposure of the abyss was central to Strauss’ thought, and occupies a central place in that of the Straussians. As Bloom demonstrates:

The pre-Hitler Weimar Republic also contained intelligent persons who were attracted, at least in the beginning, to fascism, for reasons very like those motivating the Left’s ideologies – that is, by reflections on autonomy and ‘value creation’. Once one plunges into the abyss, there is no assurance whatsoever that equality, democracy, or socialism will be found on the other side.68

The Straussians’ account of the crisis in the political and social scientific realms is paralleled by a perceived crisis in philosophy. Bloom asserts the crisis can be seen as a reflection of a crisis at the peaks of learning, an incoherence and incompatibility among the first principles with which we interpret the world, an intellectual crisis of the greatest magnitude, which constitutes the crisis of our civilization.69

Similarly, Fukuyama notes that “the traumatic events of the twentieth century formed the backdrop to a profound intellectual crisis as well.”70 As Bloom’s statement suggests, the crisis in Western philosophy relates to the primary principles which are used to understand and explain the world. As discussed in Chapter One, the challenges posed to philosophy by Nietzsche and Heidegger were taken very seriously by Strauss. Bloom concurred with Strauss’, arguing that “Nietzsche is the profoundest, clearest, most powerful diagnosis of the disease.”71 The crisis of the West was, then, whilst being brought to the fore by the political crisis understood as the inadequate response of the US to the communist threat, closely related to the crisis in Western philosophy; Bloom argues that not only are the political and philosophical crises linked, they are the same: “the novel aspect of the crisis of the West is that it is identical with a crisis in philosophy.”72

67 Jaffa, Thomism and Aristotelianism, pp. 1-2. That Jaffa’s analysis does not explore the degree to which the ‘fact-based’ discussion between the anthropologist and the Nazi scientist regarding the scientific merit of the latter’s claims would always already be permeated by the values of each, not least in their initial research questions and motivation for having the discussion to begin with, suggests that while he makes the more limited point that ‘value’ ought not to be left out so that the anthropologist can condemn the Nazi, his argument might have been made more strongly by arguing that ‘value’ cannot be left out, a point that Strauss himself focuses upon.
The crisis of philosophy is directly related, for Strauss, to the onset of the ‘modern’ project, beginning with Machiavelli; this too the Straussians inherited from their teacher. Mansfield suggests that “when we contrast political science with political philosophy we are really speaking of two kinds of political philosophy, modern and ancient.”\(^{73}\) According to Bloom, the modern project was an attempt to bring in a “new dawn in which men would become reasonable and everything would be for the best.” It was intended, he continues, to cope with man’s supposed nature by basing society on rational self-interest. Thus,

it was not by forgetting about the evil in man that they [the modern philosophers] hoped to better his lot but by giving way to it rather than opposing it, by lowering standards... Selfishness was to be the means to the common good...\(^{74}\)

As in the work of Strauss, the theme of the lowering of standards in the modern project recurs throughout the Straussians’ writings. Fukuyama demonstrates this in his comment that “‘self-interest rightly understood’ came to be a broadly understandable principle that laid a low but solid ground for public virtue...”\(^{75}\) Similarly, Kristol notes that “the moderns reduce the need for prudence and statesmanship by lowering the goals of politics...”\(^{76}\)

The significance of the lowering of standards relates for the Straussians, as it did for Strauss, to bearings from which society determines the good. In Bloom’s assessment, society is predicated on the existence of shared values; in his words, “the West is defined by its need for justification of its ways or values, by its need for the discovery of nature, by its need for philosophy and science.”\(^{77}\) Such values form the core of human interaction and existence: “good and evil are what make it possible for men to live and act. The character of their judgements of good and evil shows what they are.”\(^{78}\) Thus for Bloom, as for Strauss, the problems associated with the crisis are connected, not to say identical, to the loss of faith or confidence in the West’s notions of good and evil.

Concurring with Strauss, this loss of points of reference occurred, according to Bloom, as a direct consequence of the Enlightenment. It was the Enlightenment philosophers’ intention to bring reason, understood as freedom from the constraints of inherited wisdom and traditional values, to all in society; they thought, Bloom argues, that “civil society, a people, a demos, could do without false opinions.” The Enlightenment thinkers thought, he continues, that “it was possible to make all men reasonable, to change what had always and everywhere been the case.”\(^{79}\) Referring to Socrates’, Bloom explains

\(^{75}\) Fukuyama, *The End of History*, p. 327.
\(^{76}\) Lenzner and Kristol, “What was Leo Strauss up to?”, p. 28-29.
\(^{78}\) Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, p. 197.
that the “Enlightenment thinkers took on his case and carried on a war against the
continuing threat to science posed by first causes that are irrational or beyond reason.”
This is because, as Fukuyama notes, “according to Nietzsche, a living thing cannot be
healthy, strong or productive except by living within a certain horizon, that is a set of beliefs
that are accepted absolutely and uncritically.” However, he continues, modern education

liberates men from their attachments to tradition and authority. They realize that
their horizon is merely a horizon, not solid land but a mirage that disappears as one
draws closer, giving way to yet another horizon beyond... [Modern man has been]
disabused of the possibility of direct experience of values.

The consequence of this was, in Bloom’s words, that
good and evil now for the first time appeared as values, of which there have been a
thousand and one, none more rationally or objectively preferable to any other. The
salutary illusion about the existence of good and evil has been definitely expelled.

Thus, for Bloom, when Nietzsche subjected reason to such investigation, he showed that
“rationalism is unable to rule in culture or soul, that it cannot defend itself theoretically and
that its human consequences are intolerable. This,” Bloom continues, “constitutes a crisis of
the West, for everywhere in the West, for the first time ever, all regimes are founded on
reason.” This is because “reason is unable to establish its unity, to decide what should be in
it, to divide up the intellectual labor. It floats without compass or rudder.” He concludes, in
short, that “reason cannot establish values, and its belief that it can is the stupidest and most
pernicious illusion.” Thus, reason was unable to perform the function previously fulfilled
by faith, superstition and tradition: “values are not discovered by reason, and it is fruitless to
seek them.”

Jaffa seems to endorse this position, arguing that

the attempt to remove scepticism from philosophy had proved an utter failure. The
project to infinitely enhance the power of reason over human life had culminated in
the fact-value distinction, and the complete destruction of reason as a guide to
human life.

According to Bloom, Nietzsche “argues that there is an inner necessity for us to abandon
reason on rational grounds – that therefore our regime is doomed.” Thus, “nihilism is a
dangerous but a necessary and possibly a salutary stage in human history. In it man faces his
true situation.” This shows that for the Straussians discussed here, like Strauss, the Nietzschean challenge exposed the foundationlessness of values and beliefs; the abyss was exposed. While this may be the true situation, Jaffa remarks that Strauss proved that modern political philosophy, in attempting to bridge the gap between theory and practice – that is, by attempting so to replace faith with reason as to eliminate all faith in reason – had laid the foundation of modern atheistic totalitarianism, the most terrible form of tyranny in human experience.

Jaffa emphasises here the dangers posed by this exposure; for Strauss, the undermining of value and reason rendered the descent into extremism and tyranny possible.

Many of the Straussians explore the notion of the abyss, although Bloom’s commentary is the most extensive. He states:

Nietzsche with the utmost gravity told modern man that he was free-falling into the abyss of nihilism... Nobody really believes in anything anymore, and everyone spends his life in frenzied work and play so as not to face the fact, not to look into the abyss.

This is another way of characterising the ‘last man’ for Bloom, a concern he shared with Fukuyama. The last man does not confront the abyss, busying himself with his own self-interest and comfortable self-preservation. It is, according to Bloom, only the creative individual, the creator of value described above, who confronts the abyss and is able to face the responsibility of creating new values. Jaffa seems to concur: “the Thinker – having triumphed over the terror of the abyss – alone lives without illusions, without either fear or hope, but in a unprecedented freedom.” Jaffa’s ‘thinkers’, in Bloom’s words, the ‘few creators’, should be brought to the abyss, terrified by their danger and nauseated by what might become of them, in order to make them aware of their responsibility for their fate... Chaos, the war of opposites, is, as we know from the Bible, the condition of creativity, which must be mastered by the creator.

It is vital for Bloom that the abyss is confronted and mastered by the creators of value because of the potential consequences. As he explains,

once one plunges into the abyss, there is no assurance whatsoever that equality, democracy or socialism will be found on the other side. At very best, self-determination is indeterminate.

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This concern resides that the heart of the Straussian project and is intimately connected to Strauss’ own concerns about the relationship between relativism and the political tyrannies of the twentieth century. The Straussians affirm such a connection, claiming that the consequences of dismantling moral values in society created a vacuum within which it was possible for Nazism to take hold. Mansfield, for instance, argues that “although Nietzsche himself would never have been a Nazi, his influence helped create what has been called ‘German nihilism’.”95 The Straussians, then, charge that the Nietzschean challenge undermines the possibility of guarding against tyranny; it must then be combated by the excellent few who can generate meaning for the many in order to avoid despair and tyranny. Strauss’ response to this was to look back to the ancients; in this, too, the Straussians followed their teacher.

Following Strauss to the Ancients

According to two of his followers, Strauss was “‘inclined’ to the judgement that the human or political wisdom of the ancient thinkers, and especially of the Socratics, was decisively superior to any of the various modern alternatives.”96 In line with the ancients, Strauss believed that men are fundamentally unequal and that the highest of men is the philosopher. This position is taken on and developed by Straussians. The natural inequality of men is evident, they claim, in the relationship between those who generate meaning and those who consume and are directed by it. Because values cannot be deemed inherently good or evil, the relationship between men develops in light not of what they believe, but rather in terms of how and why beliefs are held, and in particular where they came from. As Bloom states, “inequality among men is proved by the fact that there is no common experience accessible in principle to all. Such distinctions as authentic-inauthentic, profound-superficial, creator-created replace true or false.”97 In other words, because the values held cannot be judged to be true or false, right or wrong, different categories of judgement emerge which relate to their being held on the one hand authentically, proudly or indeed as a consequence of an individual’s own creativity, or on the other hand, inauthentically, superficially or as a consequence of the creativity of someone else. Only the philosopher is capable of the former,

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95 Mansfield, Manliness, p. 118.
97 Bloom, The Closing of the American Mind, p. 201.
the ordinary or 'last man' being directed by his example and work. This leads to what has been termed by Bloom as the 'paradox of man'.

This paradox relates to the problem that “there are as many types of man as there are cultures.” This means that man in a strong sense has no innate character but rather that he is formed in light of culture. In Bloom’s words,

man is pure becoming, unlike any other being in nature; and it is in culture that he becomes something that transcends nature and has no other mode of existence and no support other than a particular culture... This is true not only of his habits, customs, rituals, fashions, but above all of his mind. There must be as many different kinds of mind as there are cultures.99

Thus it can be seen that man is understood here as something produced and reproduced in light of cultural values and beliefs; there is no essential man just as there is no essential good or evil. Machiavelli exposed, as was argued above, the malleability of man. As a consequence of the 'lowering of standards', the Straussian were concerned that modern liberal democracy has engendered something reminiscent of Nietzsche’s 'last man', the victory of the 'slave' morality which values comfortable self-preservation over glory, the secure over the noble risk, the mediocre over the extraordinary, in short, the average man over the rare and exceptional man. Accordingly, Fukuyama claims that “the liberal democratic state did not constitute a synthesis of the morality of the master and the morality of the slave, as Hegel had said. For Nietzsche, it represented the unconditional victory of the slave,”100 subsequently stating that, “we can readily accept many of Nietzsche’s acute psychological observations.”101 Therefore, because modern society has produced this last man, the Straussian’s work suggests, intervention is required.

Such a generation of meaning can be seen in the writings of, for instance, Mansfield. Mansfield explores a notion which he calls ‘manliness’ in his book of the same name, a concept he intends to revivify and rehabilitate. In the gender-neutral society, he argues, “we have replaced the manly man with the bourgeois,” who “are unmanly because they want a longer or less troubled life rather than a short, eventful life in the noble manner of Achilles.”102 The noble manly individual has the same character as those associated with Strauss’ philosopher; manliness “seeks to be theatrical, welcomes drama, wants your

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100 Fukuyama, The End of History, p. 301.
102 Mansfield, Manliness, p. 232.
attention... favors war, likes risk, and admires heroes... likes to show off and wants to be appreciated.”¹⁰³ In contrast to this, the bourgeois individual

prefers routine and doesn’t like getting excited... wants our lives to be bound by rules... wants peace, discounts risk, and prefers role models to heroes... prefers your weakness to your strength, your guilt to your pride... would rather not be seen in public, and it dislikes high standards because they cannot be stated in rules or made universal.¹⁰⁴

This manly man has, Mansfield claims, been undermined by the onset of the gender-neutral society of modern liberal democracy: “the entire enterprise of modernity... could be understood as a project to keep manliness unemployed.”¹⁰⁵ This attempt to remove the assertive and independent manly man is related to the supplanting of traditional or classical beliefs by reason. Mansfield argues, following Strauss and the other Strausians, that

after Machiavelli the notion of modern rational control took shape... Modern rational control differs from the classical philosophy that we have seen to be rather friendly to manliness... Our rational control, fearing courage more than fear, will do without manliness and will seek to supplant it...¹⁰⁶

Thus, the inequality of men, specifically the manly individual and the bourgeois individual is apparent in Mansfield’s work, and the latter is a consequence of the ‘reason’ operating in modern liberal society. His plea to re-invoke the manly spirit he describes can consequently be seen as a profoundly politicised intervention. Because individuals are produced in light of the society and culture they inhabit, by calling people back to manliness, Mansfield attempts to contribute to the generation a certain kind of subject, to encourage the social development of the manly character described above and to undermine the gender-neutral assumptions and movements for which he so clearly holds contempt.

A similar theme runs through the work of Fukuyama. While Mansfield is concerned with the gender issues in the crisis-riddled modern West, Fukuyama’s attention is focused more directly on the bourgeois ‘last man’ described by Nietzsche, indeed the title of his seminal text, The End of History and The Last Man refers directly to this. According to Fukuyama, “the typical citizen of liberal democracy was a ‘last man’ who, schooled by the founders of modern liberalism, gave up prideful belief in his or her own superior worth in favor of comfortable self-preservation.”¹⁰⁷ This last man is characterised, he continues, by a deficiency of a particular quality of the soul, a component Plato called ‘thymos’, meaning

¹⁰³ Mansfield, Manliness, p. 233.
¹⁰⁴ Mansfield, Manliness, pp. 233-234.
¹⁰⁵ Mansfield, Manliness, p. 230.
¹⁰⁶ Mansfield, Manliness, p. 232.
¹⁰⁷ Fukuyama, The End of History, p. xxii
‘spiritedness’. This quality relates closely to Mansfield’s notion of ‘manliness’, indeed the latter quality is connected ‘thumos’ by Mansfield in the conclusion to his text.

According to Fukuyama, thymos is related to self-esteem and a desire to be recognised by others, and he introduces the new word megalothy mia to indicate specifically “the desire to be recognised as superior to other people.” Such a desire, he argues, is essential in society: “Nietzsche was absolutely correct in his belief that some degree of megalothy mia is a necessary precondition for life itself.” Without such a drive, he claims, a society “would have little art or literature, music or intellectual life. It would be incompetently governed as few people of quality would choose a life of public service.” This will to be recognised as superior relates to the inequality of man; it is those possessing megalothy mia who are superior to those displaying the opposite quality of isothymia (meaning the will to be recognised as equal), which is characteristic of modern, levelling society and the last man which the latter pertains to. Like the ‘manly’ individual, the person possessing megalothy mia stands in marked contrast to the last man, the citizen of modern liberal democracy, who seeks nothing more daring that comfortable self-preservation. It is, however, modern liberal democracy which breeds isothymia according to Fukuyama: “Liberal democracy replaces the irrational desire to be greater than others with a rational desire to be recognized as equal.”

The identification and encouragement of these kind of characteristics can be read, I would suggest, as part of a matrix of meaning generation. Beyond these, however, the themes identified in Chapter One relating to Strauss’ emphasis on the creation of salutary social opinion are also discernable in the works of the Strauussians.

The Generation and Preservation of Salutary Social Opinions: the Friend/Enemy Dichotomy, the Tyrannous Regime, and Justice

For the Strauussians, as for Strauss, the creation and preservation of salutary social opinions is vital for society and indeed constitutive of the citizens therein. As Bloom describes, “it is

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109 Mansfield, Manliness, p. 230. The alternative spelling here occurs in Mansfield’s text.
110 Fukuyama, The End of History, p. 182.
evident that... myths are what animates a culture, and the makers of myths are the makers of culture and man.”\textsuperscript{114} By this, he seems to be suggesting that ‘man’, understood as mankind, in a fundamental sense is made in reference to culture, which is itself made by the makers of myths. Bloom explains:

the individual value of one man becomes the polestar for many others whose own experience provides them with no guidance. The rarest man is the creator, and all other men need and follow him.\textsuperscript{115}

Because of the absence of any set of foundational points of reference in society, such points are constructed and imposed, and it is the rarest of men alone who is capable of such creation, creation which all other men need. This is crucial because people are in a strong sense formed in light of the culture envisaged and provided by the polestar. This making of myths relates, therefore, to the making of culture, and in a profound sense, to the making of man. As Fukuyama notes,

when communities are bound together in a single belief handed down from ancestors many generations removed, the authority of that belief was taken for granted and became the constituent element of a person’s moral character.\textsuperscript{116}

Because such values cannot be deduced from reason, they must be sought out through non-rational means; the “‘rational’ system needs a moral supplement in order to work, and... this morality is not itself rational.”\textsuperscript{117} Because of this, the Straussians claim that it is imperative for social survival that values are invented:

Moses, Jesus, Homer, Buddha: these are the creators, the men who formed the horizons, the founders of Jewish, Christian, Greek and Indian culture. It is not the truth of their thought that distinguished them, but its capacity to generate culture.\textsuperscript{118}

Here, Bloom seems to suggest that what is required is the ability to generate belief in followers, and it is this ability rather than the truth of the doctrine propounded which is important in society. This seems to be corroborated by the subsequent statement that “commitment values the values and makes them valuable... since there is no truth in the values.”\textsuperscript{119} He seems here to be suggesting that since values are not absolute or essential, it is the commitment of persons to them which makes them valuable. Importantly for the present study, as well as these values being invented, they must also be imposed:

\textsuperscript{114} Bloom, \textit{The Closing of the American Mind}, p. 204.
\textsuperscript{115} Bloom, \textit{The Closing of the American Mind}, p. 201.
\textsuperscript{116} Fukuyama, \textit{The End of History}, pp. 307-308.
\textsuperscript{117} Bloom, \textit{The Closing of the American Mind}, p. 209.
\textsuperscript{118} Bloom, \textit{The Closing of the American Mind}, p. 201.
\textsuperscript{119} Bloom, \textit{The Closing of the American Mind}, p. 201.
Since values are not rational and not grounded in the natures of those subject to them, they must be imposed. They must defeat opposing values. Rational persuasion cannot make them believed, so struggle is necessary.\textsuperscript{120}

This statement clearly shows that for Bloom, not only are values not universal, but also that they do not spring from reason or the nature of individuals; they must, therefore, be enforced by struggle, by the competition between alternative perspectives. The generation of standards and meaning, and the imposition of these, are thus central to the Straussian persuasion, and several means by which this is attempted are discernable in their work.

Strauss’ emphasis on the practice of esoteric teaching is also reflected in the Straussians’ account. The philosopher, according to Bloom, “loves the truth... [but] he does not love to tell the truth.” This is because, he continues, he risks persecution if he undermines the beliefs and values of society; “presumably he would prefer not to practice deception; but it is a condition of his survival... So philosophers engage in a gentle art of deception.”\textsuperscript{121} That Bloom is compelled by Strauss’ ‘discovery’ is suggested in his assertion that it is not merely of historical interest but is, rather, “fraught with philosophic significance, for the different mode of expression reflects a different understanding of reason and its relation to civil society.”\textsuperscript{122} This suggests that Bloom took Strauss’ ideas relating to esoteric writing and interpretation seriously. Similarly, Kristol, with co-author Lenzner, has also examined and explained this practice. They claim that Goethe was the last philosopher to focus on “the connection between persecution and the art of writing.” They explain that a text comprising exoteric and esoteric meanings should be studied with at least as much attention to “literary questions as philosophic problems.” Such a text, they continue,

is written with the utmost precision. It may come in a variety of forms – dialogue, commentary, and treatise, among others. Its author has at his disposal countless literary devices in order simultaneously to conceal and to reveal his true teaching.\textsuperscript{123} These include, Lenzner and Kristol claim, “obscurity of the plan, contradictions, pseudonyms, inexact repetitions of earlier statements, strange expressions, etc.”\textsuperscript{124}

In addition, Schmitt and Shulsky comment upon Strauss’ rediscovery of this practice. They assert that Strauss’ claims were unpopular and provoked dissatisfaction among his contemporaries. They attribute to him the position that “political life may be closely linked to deception. Indeed, it suggests that deception is the norm in political life.”\textsuperscript{125} This highlights

\textsuperscript{120} Bloom, \textit{The Closing of the American Mind}, p. 201.
\textsuperscript{121} Bloom, \textit{The Closing of the American Mind} p. 279.
\textsuperscript{122} Bloom, \textit{Giants and Dwarfs}, p. 244.
\textsuperscript{123} Lenzner and Kristol, “What was Leo Strauss up to?”, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{124} Lenzner and Kristol, “What was Leo Strauss up to?”, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{125} Gary Schmitt and Abram Shulsky, “Leo Strauss and the World of Intelligence, By Which We Do Not Mean Nous,” in Deutsch and Murley (eds.) \textit{Leo Strauss, the Straussians and the American Regime}, p. 410.
the important connection between the question of truth and society; esoteric writing was employed because philosophy’s tendency to overturn social opinions runs counter to society’s need for points of reference from which meaning may be gleaned. This leads to the core of the Straussian position, which is summed up by Bloom as follows:

To live, to have any inner substance, a man must have values, must be committed, or engage. Therefore a cultural-relativist must care for culture more than truth, and fight for culture while knowing it is not true.\textsuperscript{126}

The Straussians follow Strauss in their identification of the means by which such meaning may be generated.

The friend/enemy binary inherited by Strauss from Carl Schmitt is central to the Straussians’ generation of meaning. The following chapter will explore this in detail, but suffice it to note here that for Bloom, conflict with an enemy is central to the formation and maintenance of society:

War is the fundamental phenomenon on which peace can sometimes be forced, but always in the most precarious way... Cultures fight wars with each other. They do so because values can only be asserted or posited by overcoming others, not by reasoning with them... Culture means war against chaos and war against other cultures. The very idea of culture carries with it a value: man needs culture and must do what is necessary to create and maintain cultures.\textsuperscript{127}

Without such conflict, Fukuyama warns, men will become animals again, as they were before the bloody battle of history began. A dog is content to sleep in the sun all day provided he is fed, because he is not dissatisfied with what he is... If man reaches a society in which he has succeeded in abolishing injustice, his life will come to resemble that of the dog. Human life, then, involves a curious paradox: it seems to require injustice, for the struggle against injustice is what calls forth the highest in man.\textsuperscript{128}

The conflict with an enemy is, then, vital to revivify both culture and man according to these Straussians.

The notion of the regime is also prominent in the Straussians’ work. Just as Strauss advocated, Lenzner and Kristol propose a “rehabilitation of the classical understanding of ‘regime’.”\textsuperscript{129} They explain: the regime is “the fundamental political phenomenon...” It can be understood, they continue, as “‘the way of life of a society’ as exemplified by what society most looks up to or that from which it takes its bearings.”\textsuperscript{130} As Schmitt and Shulsky succinctly put it, as regards persons acting under the auspices of a particular regime, the

\textsuperscript{128} Fukuyama, The End of History, p. 311.
\textsuperscript{129} Lenzner and Kristol, “What was Leo Strauss up to?” p. 38.
\textsuperscript{130} Lenzner and Kristol, “What was Leo Strauss up to?” p. 28.
latter “shapes political action in so fundamental a way the very souls appear different.”\textsuperscript{131} The regime is, for the Straussian, a crucially significant term to the extent that it fundamentally forms, is the sense of constitutes, the citizens who are subject to it. Zuckert and Zuckert elaborate, claiming that the regime should be understood as

the ruling element within any given form [of government] or the ruling norms embodied in the ruling element... Strauss sees the political in the form of the regime as supreme – pervasive and architectonic.\textsuperscript{132}

As Bloom corroborates, the nature of the regime is closely related to the kind of citizens it both requires and produces:

Always important is the political regime, which needs citizens who are in accord with its fundamental principle. Aristocracies want gentlemen, oligarchies men who respect and pursue money, and democracies lovers of equality. Democratic education, whether it admits it or not, wants and needs to produce men and women who have the tastes, knowledge, and character supportive of a democratic regime.\textsuperscript{133}

He explains further elsewhere that,

the character of life is decidedly influenced by the character of the regime under which man lives, and it is the regime that encourages or discourages the growth within it of the various human types. Any change in a way of life presupposes a change in the political, and it is by means of the political that the change must be effected. It is in their living together that men develop their human potential, and it is the political regime which determines the goals and the arrangement of the life in common.\textsuperscript{134}

Many of the Straussians utilise this term. Mansfield, for instance, claims that “every regime has a partisan tendency, even democracy.”\textsuperscript{135} Similarly, Kristol cites the notion of the regime as the “fundamental political phenomenon,” continuing that “it is the ‘regime’ understood as the ‘way of life of a society’ as exemplified by what society most looks up to or that from which it takes its bearings.”\textsuperscript{136} Importantly for what follows, Kristol elsewhere emphasises the concept of ‘regime change’: “we intend to promote regime change – primarily through

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\bibitem{131} Schmitt and Shulsky, “Leo Strauss and the World of Intelligence,” p. 409.
\bibitem{132} Zuckert and Zuckert, \textit{The Truth about Leo Strauss}, p. 191. This account of the regime seems to be closely linked to post-structuralist ideas about ‘the political’ as always already everywhere. Strauss does not limit the political to the formal workings of a political establishment but rather mobilises the notion of the ‘regime’ in order to illustrate the politicised nature of the entire socio-political and culture construct of a society. This appears to invite a parallel with the Straussians’ intervention into the realm of intelligence production; since intelligence, like the regime, is always already politicised, directing this politicisation becomes key to the project.
\bibitem{136} Lenzner and Kristol, “What was Leo Strauss up to?”, p. 28.
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peaceful means, but not ruling out military force in the case of threats to us.”

The significance of this is that the regime, for Strauss and for the Straussians, means more than simply a change in the mode of governance; it relates to a total cultural overhaul, a fundamental attempt to remake and reorient a society.

Strauss’ concern to reintroduce the concept of the tyrannous regime into circulation can be perceived residing at the heart of the Straussians’ position. As Jaffa notes,

to the best of my recollection, in the political science of the 1930s neither Hitler nor Stalin was referred to as a tyrant. Their regimes were called dictatorships, or totalitarian, in deference to the quest for ‘value free’ objectivity. Yet this ‘objectivity’ made it impossible to understand the political reality. Strauss’s On Tyranny was written in part to restore the classical term and with it the classical understanding. Here, Jaffa indicates that Strauss was motivated to encourage the use of the notion of tyranny because it more closely expressed what he deemed to be the correct way to understand the regimes of Hitler and Stalin. It was, then, a deliberate reintroduction of a term which pertained to a particular reading of the political situation of the 1930s, which implies that Strauss had a political agenda insofar as he wrote On Tyranny to encourage such a reintroduction. Lenzner and Kristol appear to reaffirm this rehabilitation, claiming that “Strauss indict the political science of his day for a massive intellectual failure: its inability to recognize for what they were the tyrannies of Hitler and Stalin.” Its rehabilitation was necessary, Jaffa explains, because in the absence of an ability to recognise tyranny and label it as such, the threat it poses to democratic regimes is all the greater: “it was the corruption of that original understanding [the classical concept of tyranny] by modern philosophy that denied to the democracies the understanding of tyranny that nearly destroyed them.” This suggests that for the Straussians discussed here, as for Strauss, the reintroduction of the classical concept of tyranny was vital in order that modern democracies might appropriately understand the danger posed by absence of value from the conceptualisation of enemies; the moral clarity inherent to the notion of tyranny is thus emphasised as integral to the fight against it; without such a value judgment, democracies render themselves unable to adequately confront and resist their enemies. The concept of ‘tyranny’ is thus indissociable from the appeal to moral clarity which resides at its heart.

There is, then, a pragmatic dimension to Strauss’ insistence on the restoration of the notion

138 Jaffa, “Strauss at One Hundred,” p. 44.
139 Lenzner and Kristol, “What was Leo Strauss up to?” p. 33.
140 Jaffa, “Strauss at One Hundred,” p. 44.
of tyranny; as Kristol and Lenzner comment, “one should not underestimate the practical utility of Strauss’ rediscovery of the term ‘tyranny’.”

Finally, the question of justice as the reason of the strongest derived from the dialogue between Socrates and Thrasymachus resides at the core of the Straussian’s thought. As Jaffa demonstrates:

*Crisis of the House Divided* was not meant to be a book about American History, except incidentally. It is in the form of a disputed question, itself a form of the Socratic dialogue. It was born in my mind when I discovered – at a time when I was studying the *Republic* with Leo Strauss – that the issue between Lincoln and Douglas was in substance, and very nearly in form, identical with the issue between Socrates and Thrasymachus.

As well as reinforcing the crucial significance this interlocution had for Strauss, this demonstrates the centrality of this ancient interlocution to Jaffa’s work. His understanding of this, he explains, entails that “Douglas’s doctrine of ‘popular sovereignty’ meant no more than that: in a democracy, justice is the interest of the majority, which is ‘the stronger’.” Douglas represents, then, the tyrannous teaching of Thrasymachus explored in Chapter One that justice is no more than the reason of the strongest. Jaffa continues: “the Lincolnian case for government of the people and by the people always implied that being for the people meant being for a moral purpose that informs the people’s being.” In other words, Lincoln saw, as did Socrates, the importance of public standards of moral goodness, and would insist that these must not be undermined. Bloom echoes this point, claiming that in the *Republic* we are shown by Plato that “the gods are believed to be the founders of every city and are its most important beings. He [Socrates] would not have dared to banish them in defense of himself.” The modern project can be seen then, as Bloom echoes, as “an attempt to give political status to what Socrates represents,” but which the latter knew better than to attempt himself. This conceptualisation of justice amounting solely to the will of the tyrant or reason of the strongest thus resides at the heart of Jaffa’s text.

To summarise, this chapter has demonstrated that the Straussian inherited from their teacher a concern with the modern condition, and the imperative to generate and disseminate salutary opinions as a means by which to counter its relativising connotations. They furthermore share with Strauss a commitment to the Schmittean friend/enemy binary, the rehabilitation of the concept of the regime, in particular in relation to the notion of tyranny, and finally that justice consists in the reason or will of the strongest. The Straussian

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141 Lenzner and Kristol, “What was Leo Strauss up to?” p. 34.
interventions relating to the invasion of Iraq can be read as corresponding closely to the imperative to generate social opinion. Their activities in the fields of intelligence production, think tanks/interest groups, and the media betray, it will be shown, precisely this logic. It is their interventions in these realms that will now be turned to.
Chapter Three

The Straussian Interventions and the Invasion of Iraq

Introduction

With the exception of Bloom, who died in 1992, all of the Strausians discussed here intervened directly following the 9/11 attacks in order to realise the invasion of Iraq. While the activities of many members of the broader neoconservative movement who occupied positions at the heart of the foreign policy establishment have been well documented, the interventions of Straussians in the realms of intelligence production, think tanks, and the media have been less thoroughly explored in IR or beyond. It will be argued here that the generation and dissemination of opinion occupies a central place in the Straussian interventions in these spheres, and that the way in which such opinion generates social opinion corresponds closely to Strauss’ prescriptions. It will argue that these interventions can be read as corresponding to the imperative to offset the pernicious, relativising consequences of the abyss by constructing totalising narratives which provide points of reference from which a raison d’être might be inferred for society and its citizens. The friend/enemy binary and the notion of the tyrannous regime can be seen to be central to this process; these themes will constantly be in view in the exploration below. The imposition of such totalising premises corresponds to the functioning of justice as the reason of the strongest, a premise central to Straussianism.

The Straussian Intervention in the Realm of Intelligence Production

While Jim George notes the influence of Straussians in the sphere of intelligence production, commenting upon the dubiousness of the sources drawn upon, and Owens mentions the

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2 George, “Leo Strauss, Neoconservatism and US Foreign Policy.”
“bold misrepresentation of intelligence estimates about weapons of mass destruction,” this thesis provides the first detailed study of this in IR, especially as regards exploration of the theoretical underpinning of these interventions.

Schmitt, Shulsky and Wolfowitz had been active in the intelligence community for many years prior to 9/11 attacks, during which time they posed significant challenges to the traditional methods and practices of the intelligence community. All three were involved in the early 1990s in the Consortium for the Study of Intelligence’s Working Group on Intelligence Reform, a group established explicitly to reform intelligence practices which met over a period of two years, indeed Schmitt was the Group’s Co-ordinator and co-edited the book publishing its findings. According to this book, its contents are derived from the US’s “most experienced practitioners and scholars of intelligence,” who have “identified the principle issues of intelligence reform and developed innovative approaches for solving the problems associated with a major shift in policy.” Schmitt, who contributes to the introduction and co-authored one chapter of this book, is also a former executive director of the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, a position to which he was appointed by Reagan in 1984, and has been a member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. The book describes Shulsky as having held a position as a senior scholar at the National Strategy Information Centre (NSIC), as well as working for the RAND Corporation and identifies him as “a leading academic specialist”, a status which is reflected in his having contributed to three of the book’s chapters. He was also a member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in the 1980s, and Director of the Office of Special Plans from its inception in 2002. Wolfowitz, who was a member of the Commission on the Roles and Capabilities of the US Intelligence Community in the mid-1990s, also offers a section of comments in the Group’s publication.

According to Peter Boyer, Wolfowitz had “deep and abiding suspicions about the inviolability of the intelligence community’s culture and processes, a skepticism that dates back to his earliest days in government service.” Such suspicions are apparent in his criticisms of the traditional methods of the intelligence community. As Jack Davis shows, during his role in the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency between 1973 and 1977, Wolfowitz concluded that the CIA was “projecting American goals on the Soviets in a process of ‘mirror imaging,’ and were not paying adequate attention to the full range of plausible

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interpretations of Moscow’s goals and tactics.”6 ‘Mirror imaging’ refers to the presumption that a foreign government will behave in similar ways to a domestic government, i.e. that it will act in ways understood as rational at home. Shulsky and Schmitt shared this concern, explaining that ‘mirror imaging’ relates to “the judging of unfamiliar situations on the basis of familiar ones... assessing or predicting a foreign government’s actions by analogy with the actions that the analyst feels he (or his government) would take were he (or it) in a similar situation.”7 It is, according to Wolfowitz, “probably the second greatest source of intelligence error.”8 As Shulsky and Schmitt note, “cultural reasons may make it [mirror imaging] a particular problem for the U.S. intelligence community.”9 In other words, intelligence production must, according to Shulsky, Schmitt and Wolfowitz, contend with the problem that an analyst operates from within a particular set of assumptions, social opinions and codes of reason, i.e. regime, while the object of intelligence operates from within a different set. In short, the problem of mirror imaging occurs when the analyst infers the general from the specific.

These criticisms of intelligence methods relate to an underlying concern held by these Straussians relating to the theory of intelligence practice. Traditionally, the intelligence community rested on the assumption that its practices could lead to objective conclusions. This theoretical assumption was derived in large part from the ideas and practice of Sherman Kent, a Yale Professor who served in the CIA during World War II and for seventeen years during the Cold War. The Straussians involved in intelligence production have been critical of the Kentian position insofar as it represents the broadly positivist methodology of the intelligence community. As Shulsky notes, Kent “reflects the tremendous optimism of the social sciences of the 1940s and 1950s,” an optimism which was related to “a belief that the new methodology of social science would begin to bear fruit and result in a much more scientific understanding of human behaviour... on the model of the physical sciences.”10 This belief cannot, for Shulsky, be sustained: “‘scientific’ social science is much more problematic [than it seems] and... the model of the physical sciences is not applicable. This,” he continues, “undercuts Kent’s belief in intelligence as universal social science and forces us

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9 Shulsky and Schmitt, Silent Warfare, p. 73.
back to the main issue of how the information needs of a government should be met...”11 This shows that Shulsky, following Strauss, rejects the possibility of objective, value-free, positivist social science; in short, as Shulsky and Schmitt state, “such a social science method does not exist.”12 Strauss’ challenge to the positivism of modern social science is reflected in the Straussians’ criticisms of Kent’s methodologies of intelligence production; Strauss’ concerns relating to the tendency to infer the general from the specific and presumption of objectivity in positivist social science are thus echoed by the Straussians here.

Having identified the problem of ‘mirror imaging’ and asserted their disagreement with the assumptions of the Kentian method, Wolfowitz, Shulsky and Schmitt propose two major changes which might be implemented in the realm of intelligence gathering and analysis which are relevant for the present study. Firstly, they insist that the focusing on the particularities of the nation being studied must be central to intelligence production. As Shulsky and Schmitt explain,

national security... cannot be considered independently of the nation’s type of government (or regime) and its ideological outlook. Although adherents of Realpolitik would argue that a nation’s interests are determined by the objective factors of the international system, ideological view, and a country’s political culture more generally, affect how a government perceives them. For example, a regime’s ideological character may determine whether or not it views a given foreign country as a threat.13

The presence of the concept of the ‘regime’ is highly significant here; it echoes Strauss’ identification and use of the term as noted above, appearing frequently in the Shulsky’s criticisms of intelligence production, which “ignored the differences among ‘regimes’...”14 The ‘regime’, understood as the entire system of government, society and culture and the opinions and values upon which they rest, must then, for Shulsky and Schmitt, like Strauss, be taken into account; the assumptions of the analyst’s state must not be taken to be universal.

Secondly, all three of these Straussians argue that intelligence production must be more closely guided by policy makers. In Shulsky and Schmitt’s words, “having some collection capability under the control of policy-makers with specific needs, such as the

11 Shulsky, “What is Intelligence?”, p. 20. Importantly, Shulsky emphasises here that the impossibility of objective intelligence leads us back to ‘the main issue’ of how ‘governments’ intelligence needs should be met’; meeting policymaking needs seems to be deemed the central issue.
12 Shulsky and Schmitt, Silent Warfare, p. 174.
13 Shulsky and Schmitt, Silent Warfare, p. 3. The significance of the use of the term ‘regime’, outlined in chapters One and Two, will be further explored in Part Two in relation to the invasion of Iraq.
military, is likely to make the resulting intelligence more relevant.”\textsuperscript{15} Similarly, Wolfowitz argues that “the policy process should drive intelligence production...”\textsuperscript{16} By this, both seem to suggest not only that those working in the intelligence community should maintain close relations with policy makers for the sake of providing relevant and high quality material, but also that the policy maker should have a degree of control over the intelligence gathering process, or even demand that intelligence is produced with their policy aims in mind.

Shulsky’s statement that analysts should be “tailoring the product to the needs of the consumer,”\textsuperscript{17} seems to indicate this. Davis, writing about Wolfowitz’s position on this issue attributes to him the view that “policymakers must become, in effect, the senior analyst on their core account.” He continues:

> the analyst and the collector have to know the operational agendas of policymakers... Similarly, policymakers have to get close enough to intelligence to provide direct guidance to the collection and analytic processes.\textsuperscript{18}

In addition, Davis claims that Wolfowitz advocates that “analysts should see intelligence assessments as ‘tools’ to help in the development of a policy decision, and not as ‘weapons’ to determine by fiat the outcome of a policy debate.”\textsuperscript{19} As Shulsky and Schmitt comment, “closeness to policymakers, despite the threat to ‘objectivity’ that entails, makes sense if it grounds the analysts in concern for concrete policy issues that must be addressed in instrumentally useful ways.”\textsuperscript{20}

Shulsky, Schmitt and Wolfowitz anticipate the objection that this would amount to the ‘politicisation’ of intelligence gathering and analysis. The issue of politicisation relates to the question of bias, specifically of policy concerns or aims corrupting the intelligence gathering and analysing processes. In response to this objection, Shulsky and Schmitt state:

> the question of objectivity and bias is much more complicated than it might appear at first glance. A truly open mind is difficult to retain under any circumstances, and mere bureaucratic arrangements cannot guarantee it.\textsuperscript{21}

This suggests that objectivity may be more difficult to attain than the Kentian methods imply, according to the Straussians. Tellingly, Shulsky comments that, “as Paul Wolfowitz pointed out, politicisation can occur when intelligence and policy are kept quite separate.”\textsuperscript{22} What may be implied here is not that politicisation is a potential problem whether or not

\textsuperscript{15} Abram Shulsky and Gary Schmitt, “Intelligence Reform: Beyond the Ames Case,” in Godson, May and Schmitt (eds.) \textit{US Intelligence}, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{16} Wolfowitz, “Comments,” in Godson, May and Schmitt (eds.), \textit{US Intelligence}, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{17} Shulsky, “Comments”, in Godson, May and Schmitt (eds.), \textit{US Intelligence}, p. 84.
\textsuperscript{18} Davis, “Paul Wolfowitz on Intelligence-Policy Relations”.
\textsuperscript{19} Davis, “Paul Wolfowitz on Intelligence-Policy Relations”.
\textsuperscript{20} Shulsky and Schmitt, “Intelligence Reform,” p. 54. That ‘objectivity’ appears here in quotation marks suggests, perhaps, its problematic nature for the Strausssians.
\textsuperscript{21} Shulsky and Schmitt, “Intelligence Reform,” p. 53
\textsuperscript{22} Shulsky, “Comments,” p. 84
policy makers and analysts are collaborating closely but rather that intelligence is always already politicised; even if policymakers are far removed from intelligence production, the latter is not objective but rather necessarily partisan.

This analysis is corroborated in Schmitt and Shulsky’s essay “Leo Strauss and the World of Intelligence.” They write: “the trends in political science that Strauss polemisized against... also affected the world of intelligence.” 23 Kent’s central erroneous assumption relating to the international system was, they continue, that “the underlying processes were universal.” Rather than presuming a universal human nature, they argue, Strauss saw that “human nature is encountered not in its unvarnished state, but as reflected through the prism of the ‘regime’.” 24 In Shulsky and Schmitt’s challenge to the Kentian method, the “primary point of attack would have been that it ignored the differences among ‘regimes’...” 25 In other words, they suggest that it is an appreciation of the politicised nature of the Kentian model through a focus on the profound differences between individuals and groups determined by their respective regimes which Strauss would have recommended as the solution; although appearing value free or objective, Kent’s method is, according to the Straussian, like any other, necessarily politicised. The implication of Shulsky and Schmitt’s commentary here seems to be that just as Strauss rejected the possibility of objectivity and universalism in social science positivism in the academy, so too would he have done in the field of intelligence production. That they themselves follow this rationale is also suggested.

That intelligence is always already politicised for the Straussian is further demonstrated in light of Shulsky’s remarks relating to ‘Strategic Denial and Deception’. Shulsky defines ‘strategic denial’ as “special steps taken to deny particularly important pieces of information to an adversary.” 26 He further describes ‘strategic deception’ as “the effort to cause an adversary to believe... a ‘cover story’... that is, creating an ‘alternative reality’ in which the target is induced to believe.” 27 In other words, strategic denial is a process by which information is withheld, while strategic deception is the creation or production of a particular version of events. He continues:

‘strategic’ denial or deception deals with major policies of a government... a ‘strategic’ deception is one aimed at the highest levels of government or of the military chain of command (chiefs of state or government, ministers or cabinet ministers, the chairman of the JCS or head of the general staff, commanders-in-chief of theatres of

27 Shulsky, “Elements of Strategic Denial and Deception,” p. 15.
war, and other)... ‘strategic’ denial would be the effort to withhold information of the sort that a high-level official would typically deal with, were it available.28

Thus, strategic denial and deception relates to the withholding and fabrication of information at the highest levels of government and the political establishment. In short, Shulsky advocates a method of influencing a target through the withholding of information and the creation of substitute information in order to direct the target’s view of a given state of affairs. That such a method would pertain to highly politicised intelligence products is certain; that such interventions are designed to generate a desired version of events, an ‘alternative’ reality, is highly significant. If the social science methods traditionally employed can no more yield ‘truth’ than the scientific turn in the academy did, intelligence gathering and analysis is for them not so much about ascertaining objective ‘facts’ as it is about generating or creating them. Furthermore, if there never was the possibility of objective truth to be discovered, then intelligence is always already politicised; the vital question is, then, whose methods and agenda will animate intelligence collection and analysis. This agenda can be seen in the Straussian interventions relating to the invasion of Iraq.

The Intervention in the Realm of Intelligence and the Invasion of Iraq

According to Jim George, “the process by which the intelligence was gathered concerning the decision to go to war is... an exemplary case of the Straussian induced strategic deception on the part of major actors with the policy hierarchy of the Bush administration.”29 In October 2001, Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld established the Policy Counter-terrorism Evaluation Group (PCEG), although this was kept secret for more than a year.30 As Franklin Foer explains, the group was tasked “with reanalyzing the CIA’s raw intelligence and scouring for instances of Iraqi sponsorship of terrorism that the Agency had been too biased to catch.”31 Simultaneously, the Iraq desk at the Near East and South Asian Affairs (NESA) office at the Pentagon began to focus on this as well. Normally a “backwater responsible primarily for

28 Shulsky, “Elements of Strategic Denial and Deception,” p. 17.
31 Franklin Foer, “The Case against Bush, Part 1: Closing of the presidential mind,” http://www.neilrogers.com/news/articles/2004062917.html. A parallel may be drawn here between this and the “Team B” exercise of 1976, in which different intelligence methodologies were employed by a group of analysts and scholars including Wolfowitz and Shulsky (the latter in a reviewer capacity). Wolfowitz emphasised that this exercise demonstrated that “it was possible to construct a sharply different view of Soviet motivation from the consensus view of the analysts...” Cited in Dorrien, Imperial Designs, p. 56.

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arranging bilateral agreements,” during this period the control structure of the NESA was abruptly changed and this resulted, according to W. Patrick Lang, in the Iraq desk of NESA being transformed into a new entity, the Office of Special Plans (OSP), during late summer 2002. The question of the OSP as the appropriate name for the office within which interventions were made has been the subject of some debate. The DoD’s 2007 review concludes that the term Office of Special Plans has become generic terminology for the activities of the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, including the Policy Counter Terrorism Evaluation Group and Policy Support Office.

The term will be employed in this generic capacity in what follows not least because those calling for the DoD inquiry, as well as the popular and scholarly debate surrounding the affair, have done so.

There were at least two significant differences between the CIA/DIA model and the operation of the new OSP, both of which correlate to the Straussians’ reform agenda. Firstly, the latter was a secretive and evasive agency. As Karen Kwiatkowski, a former Iraq desk and OSP official explains, at the launching of the new agency she and her colleagues “were instructed at a staff meeting that this office was not to be discussed or explained, and if people in the Joint Staff, among others, asked, we were to offer no comment.” Similarly, Lang cites former Strategic, Proliferation and Military Affairs Officer at the DIA Greg Thielmann as stating of the OSP,

it was a stealth organization. They didn’t play in the intelligence community proceedings that our office participated in. When the intelligence community met as a community, there was no OSP represented in these sessions. Because, if they had done that, they would have had to subject their views to peer review. Why do that when you can send stuff right in to the vice president?

Secondly, while the CIA/DIA adhered to traditional practices of checking the credibility of intelligence, the OSP “circumvented the vetting processes.” These practices had been in place for many decades and were designed to establish the credibility of informers before they were relied upon in the intelligence community. As Kenneth Pollack, a former National Security Council expert on Iraq has argued, the OSP “dismantle[d] the existing filtering

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32 While some, including Jim George and Seymour Martin Hersh have asserted that this group can be identified and held accountable for dubious intelligence activities, critics such as Minowitz have challenged the existence and impact of this group. While the primary information necessary to settle this matter is not obtainable, the term is employed here in order to refer both to the specific group headed by Shulsky and the other groups with which it was involved.


35 Thielmann, cited in Lang, “Drinking the Kool-Aid”

36 Hersh, Chain of Command, p. 215.
process that for fifty years had been preventing the policy makers from getting bad information.”\textsuperscript{37} During this period, the OSP removed the practices of peer review, the rigorous verification of material by comparison with other existing information, and other traditional practices which would ensure that only information from reliable sources which had been corroborated would reach policy makers. This process became known as ‘stovepiping’.

Stovepiping refers to the direct feed of unsubstantiated information straight to the highest levels of the political establishment. In Gordon Mitchell’s words,

this transmission occurs through channels that circumvent institutionalised vetting procedures used to validate and coordinate intelligence assessments amongst the intelligence community’s numerous institutional entities producing official reporting.\textsuperscript{38}

Wolfowitz appears to corroborate this:

we must accelerate the speed with which information is passed to policy makers and operators. We cannot wait for critical intelligence to be processed, coordinated, edited and approved – we must accept the risks inherent in posting critical information before it is processed.\textsuperscript{39}

This ran counter to the traditional practices of the CIA/DIA. As one group of former intelligence operatives put it,

this increased intelligence/policy proximity, combined with the revolutionary growth in information management capacity and data mining tools, has given today’s policymaker the capacity to conduct his or her own fairly sophisticated analysis, independent of the traditional intelligence analysis prepared, vetted, and presented by CIA, DIA, and INR.\textsuperscript{40}

Such stovepiping can be seen as reflective of the ‘strategic denial and deception’ measures recommended by Shulsky.

As regards the versions of reality disseminated, there were several specific points of disagreement between the CIA/DIA analyses and those of the OSP, two of the most significant of which were the issue of connections between Saddam Hussein and the 9/11 attacks, and his alleged possession of WMDs. Firstly, the OSP disagreed with the CIA on the issue of the connection between Saddam Hussein and the 9/11 attacks. While Admiral Bob Inman, who held several senior intelligence positions including Deputy Director of the CIA, submitted that “there was no tie between Iraq and 9/11, even though some people tried to

\textsuperscript{37} Hersh, \textit{Chain of Command}, p. 223.
\textsuperscript{39} Wolfowitz, cited in Mitchell, “Team B Intelligence Coups,” p. 15.
\textsuperscript{40} Cited in Mitchell, “Team B Intelligence Coups,” p. 14.
postulate one... I know of no instance in which Iraq funded direct, deliberate attacks on the United States,” the OSP insisted that such a connection did exist. As Spencer Ackerman and John Judis explain, the

main piece of evidence for a link between Saddam and Al Qaeda was a meeting that was supposed to have taken place in Prague in April 2001 between lead September 11 hijacker Mohamed Atta and an Iraqi intelligence official. But none of the intelligence agencies could place Atta in Prague on that date. (Indeed, receipts and other travel documents placed him in the United States.) An investigation by Czech officials dismissed the claim, which was based on a single unreliable witness.

Secondly, the CIA/DIA were dubious about Iraq’s biological and chemical weapons arsenal, and rejected the notion of a nuclear threat:

CIA analysts also generally endorsed the findings of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which concluded that...[Iraq’s] present capabilities were virtually nil. The IAEA possessed no evidence that Iraq was reconstituting its nuclear program and, it seems, neither did U.S. intelligence. In CIA Director George Tenet’s January 2002 review of global weapons-technology proliferation, he did not even mention a nuclear threat from Iraq...

In contrast, the OSP insisted that Saddam had an extensive quantity of these at his disposal. They further emphasized that this risk was compounded by the aforementioned connections between Iraq and Islamic fundamentalist militants, the former being likely to arm the latter in order to attack the US or Israel. As Kwiatkowski attests,

at the OSP, what they were doing was looking at all the intelligence they could find on WMD. That was the focal point, picking bits and pieces that were the most inflammatory, removing any context that might have been provided in the original intelligence report, that would have caused you to have some pause in believing it or reflected doubts that the intelligence community had, so if the intelligence community had doubts, those would be left out... They would take items that had occurred many years ago, and put them in the present tense, make it seem like they occurred not many years ago... But they would not talk about the dates; they would say things like, ‘He has continued since that time’ and ‘He could do it tomorrow,’ which of course, wasn’t true...

This appears to substantiate the suggestion that because, for the Straussians as for Strauss, intelligence production would always already be politicised, because objectivity was impossible, the important point is to determine whose agenda will dominate in the production of inevitably partisan accounts; there is no ‘truth’ to contend with but a battle to be fought over which of many possible apparently true accounts will prevail. The OSP’s insistence that Saddam Hussein had connections to terrorism and an extensive arsenal of

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41 Cited in Lang, “Drinking the Kool-Aid”.
43 Ackerman and Judis, “The First Casualty”.
44 Kwiatkowski, cited in Lang, “Drinking the Kool-Aid”.

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WMD can be seen to illustrate that it is possible to produce sharply different conclusions from the same material if positivist methods of verification and vetting, and assumptions of inference and deduction, were challenged. This can be read as an explicit instance of the generation of opinion in society.

Iraq’s connections to the 9/11 attackers and the possession of WMDs were the focus of a series of ‘talking points’ which the OSP produced. Kwiatkowski recalls that at an initial meeting, staff members were “told that one of the products of this office would be talking points that all desk officers would use verbatim in the preparation of their background documents.”45 According to Lang, these points “were to be the only briefings provided on Iraq.”46 As Kwiatkowski confirms, “all desk officers were ordered to use them verbatim in the preparation of any material prepared for higher-ups and people outside the Pentagon.”47 While access to these talking points themselves is not possible, Kwiatkowski describes them as “a series of bulleted statements, written persuasively and in a convincing way, and superficially they seemed reasonable and rational.”48 They contained, she continues, several themes relating to the question of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. For instance, she states, they emphasised that “Saddam Hussein has gassed his neighbors, abused his people, and was continuing in that mode, becoming an imminently dangerous threat to his neighbors and to us – except that none of his neighbors or Israel felt this was the case.”49 Furthermore, there was an emphasis on the notion that “Saddam Hussein had harboured al-Qaida operatives and offered and probably provided them with training facilities – without mentioning that the suspected facilities were in the U.S./Kurdish-controlled part of Iraq.”50 In addition, the talking points claimed that “Saddam Hussein was pursuing and had WMD of the type that could be used by him, in conjunction with al-Qaida and other terrorists, to attack and damage American interests, Americans and America – except that the intelligence didn’t really say that.”51 She states that they concluded that

Saddam Hussein had not been seriously weakened by war and sanctions and weekly bombings over the past 12 years, and in fact was plotting to hurt America and support anti-American activities, in part through his carrying on with terrorists – although here the intelligence said the opposite.52

45 Karen Kwiatkowski, “In Rumsfeld’s Shop”.
46 Lang, “Drinking the Kool-Aid”
48 Kwiatkowski, “The New Pentagon Papers”.
49 Kwiatkowski, “The New Pentagon Papers”.
50 Kwiatkowski, “The New Pentagon Papers”.
51 Kwiatkowski, “The New Pentagon Papers”.
52 Kwiatkowski, “The New Pentagon Papers”.
While these themes remained consistently central to the talking points, they were frequently redrafted, especially between September 2002 and January 2003, including the modification or removal of certain points or examples. All of this led Kwiatkowski to reflect that with the talking points, many of the propagandistic bullets that were given to use in papers for our superiors to inform them -- internal propaganda -- many of those same phrases and assumptions and tones, I saw in Vice President Cheney's speeches and the president's speeches. So I got the impression that those talking points were not just for us, but were the core of an overall agenda for a disciplined product, beyond the Pentagon. Over at the vice president's office and the Weekly Standard, the media, and the neoconservative talking heads and that kind of thing, all on the same sheet of music.\footnote{Kwiatkowski, cited in Lang, “Drinking the Kool-Aid”. The connection made here between the activities of Straussian in the sphere of intelligence and those involved in producing the \textit{Weekly Standard} is noteworthy, and will be explored below.}

Kwiatkowski cites Shulsky as the principle author of these talking points. She claims that he was “one of the most senior people sharing our space,” continuing that she “had a clear sense that Abe ranked high in the organization.”\footnote{Kwiatkowski, “The New Pentagon Papers”.} The talking points were only distributed, she asserts, following “Shulsky’s approval,” and the modifications which occurred over time were “directed or approved by Shulsky and his team.”\footnote{Kwiatkowski, “The New Pentagon Papers”.} In Lang’s estimation, “Shulsky seems to have set out to use the OSP as the means for providing the Bush administration policymakers all the ammunition they needed to get their desired results.”\footnote{Lang, “Drinking the Kool-Aid”.} This reinforces the notion that the strategic denial and deception tactics advocated by Shulsky, Schmitt and Wolfowitz were employed during this period; that these were underpinned by the Straussian rejection of objectivity or social-scientific methodologies has been shown.

It is important to note the source of much of the material used in the construction of these talking points. As Jim George, amongst others, has noted,\footnote{George, “Leo Strauss, Neoconservatism and US Foreign Policy,” p. 186, 194.} a significant amount of the intelligence utilised for this purpose came from Ahmed Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress (INC), the group opposing the Ba’athist government that he headed. Chalabi had been taught by Albert Wohlstetter, the nuclear strategist responsible for supervising Wolfowitz’s Ph.D. studies, at Chicago; according to Halper and Clarke, Chalabi was introduced to members of Wohlstetter’s circle in 1985 and “subsequently established key supporters among those who would occupy the Pentagon’s Middle East offices, most prominently Wolfowitz...”\footnote{Halper and Clarke, \textit{America Alone}, p. 220.} As Gary Dorrien corroborates, Chalabi was “a former student of Wohlstetter and longtime friend of Wolfowitz...”\footnote{Dorrien, \textit{Imperial Designs}, p. 67.} Having been an informant for the CIA in...
the early 1990s, Chalabi lost favour in intelligence circles not least due to his conviction for embezzling $70 million and his implication in arms sales to Iran during the Iran-Iraq war through the Petra Bank; from 1992 he was considered “persona non grata.”

Much of the information from Chalabi was obtained under the ‘Information-Collection Program,’ which had been established in January 2001. Its purpose was, according to Lang, to provide “funds to the INC for recruiting defectors from Saddam’s military and secret police, and making them available to American intelligence.” The Straussians were quick to lend their support to this program and the informants recruited by the INC, Wolfowitz asserting that information was being received “from brave people who told us the truth at the risk of their lives.” He continued, “We have that; it is very convincing.” This characterisation of the information received and utilised by the OSP under Shulsky’s direction as ‘convincing’ has, however, been frequently and extensively disputed. One such challenge can be seen in the work of Ali A. Allawi, a former Minister of Defence and Finance in the post-Ba’athist government and long time opponent of Saddam Hussein. He suggests that the OSP relied on material obtained from self-interested defectors. In his view, one of the apparently most reliable of the defectors recruited by the INC for intelligence purposes was a nuclear scientist named Khadir Hamza. Hamza, Allawi claims, “became a media celebrity and a witness in congressional committees in the run-up to the war, [the latter] finding out that Saddam was on the verge of acquiring a nuclear capability.” In spite of such concerns, Wolfowitz developed a “plan, which he had pushed for months, for building a provisional Iraqi government, even one in exile around Ahmed Chalabi.” As another commentator has put it, “the INC’s allies in Washington hope to give Chalabi a dominant role in the next government of Iraq.”

There are many important pieces of information which were ‘stovepiped’ to the highest levels of government. Suffice it to mention four of them. Firstly, the CIA received information that the Ba’athist government had attempted to purchase 500 tonnes of uranium oxide, or ‘yellowcake’, from Niger between 1999 and 2001. This material can be used as fuel for nuclear reactors or processed into weapons grade uranium. According to Lang, the Italian Secret Service reported this to the British, Israeli and American intelligence.

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60 Lang, “Drinking the Kool-Aid”.
61 Lang, “Drinking the Kool-Aid”.
62 Lang, “Drinking the Kool-Aid”.
65 Solomon, Paul D. Wolfowitz, p. 103.
agencies. He continues that in February 2002 former Ambassador Joseph Wilson was assigned to investigate the claim; “after several days of meetings in Niger, he returned to Washington and was debriefed by the CIA. The yellowcake story simply did not check out.”

One reason for this was that there was no uranium to sell; “it had all been pre-sold to Niger’s Japanese and European consortium partners.” In addition, his judgement relates to the documents themselves. Following Wilson’s return to the US, the United States allowed Jacques Baute of the IAEA’s Nuclear Verification Office to inspect the papers in the autumn of 2002. Seymour Hersh relates that

it took Baute’s team only a few hours to determine the documents were fake. The agency had been given about a half-dozen letters and other communications between officials in Niger and Iraq, many of the written on letterheads of the Niger government. The problems were glaring. One letter, dated October 10, 2000, was signed with the name of Allele Habibou, a Niger minister of foreign affairs and cooperation, who had been out of office since 1989. Another letter, allegedly from Tandja Mamadou, the president of Niger, had a signature that had so obviously been faked and a text with inaccuracies so egregious, the senior IAEA official said, that “they could have been spotted by someone using Google on the Internet”.

The documents were accordingly, Hersh asserts, quickly announced to be inauthentic.

Despite this, however, the claim continued to appear in Presidential speeches and intelligence directives. Hersh argues that there ensued a “year-long tug-of-war” over this issue, with the CIA insisting that the claim and documents were false and the Pentagon continuing to utilise them. Kwiatkowski confirms that allegations of Saddam’s attempts to purchase “fissionable materials or uranium in Africa” were included in Shulsky’s talking points; they were “written mostly in the present tense and conveniently left off the dates of the last known attempt, sometime in the late 1980s.” The CIA was so convinced that the claims were inaccurate that its Director, George Tenet, “personally intervened to remove references to the discredited African uranium story from President Bush’s early October 2002 speech in Cincinnati, Ohio.” Despite this, however, the claim appeared again in December and was repeated in the President’s State of the Union Address in January 2003. Consequently, this can be seen as an example of ‘stovepiping’ or ‘strategic denial and deception’ predicated upon the Straussian response to the impossibility of objectivity given the condition of the abyss; politicised information worked its way into speeches given by the President and other officials without having been verified, and indeed, continued to be fed to

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67 Lang, “Drinking the Kool-Aid”.
68 Hersh, Chain of Command, p. 229.
69 Hersh, Chain of Command, p. 206.
70 Hersh, Chain of Command, p. 205.
71 Hersh, Chain of Command, p. 226.
72 Kwiatkowski, “The New Pentagon Papers”.
73 Lang, “Drinking the Kool-Aid”.
74 Lang, “Drinking the Kool-Aid”.

the highest levels of government as such procedures were themselves deemed politicised by the Strausians.

Secondly, a claim emerged that Iraq had acquired a number of fortified aluminium tubes which could be used in the production of nuclear weapons. Again, the CIA had originally been informed of the story but many analysts had come to the conclusion that the tubes were not, after all, suitable for this use. Conversely, those at the OSP and the Pentagon insisted that they were intended for this purpose. This too was stoved up to the highest levels of government without a consensus having been reached, or the claims proven.

Thirdly, it was alleged, Lang explains, that “Iraq had mobile biological-weapons labs that could produce deadly weapons.” This piece of intelligence had come directly from the OSP-sponsored INC, from a single Iraqi defector who had been recruited through the ‘Intelligence Collection Program’ mentioned above. This individual had, like Chalabi, been rejected by the CIA and DIA previously for having provided inaccurate information. Their scepticism proved to be correct when, as other sources had insisted, the two mobile labs turned out to be “producing hydrogen for weather balloons.”

Finally, Shulsky’s talking points claimed that an Iraqi intelligence operative had met Mohammad Atta, one of the 9/11 suicide attackers, in Prague, something which was “supposedly salient proof that Saddam was in part responsible for the 9/11 attack.” As mentioned above, this too was quickly proven to be false, the FBI having records of Atta having been elsewhere at the relevant time. However, this point “lasted through a number of revisions” of the talking points; it was only after the media reported the claim as unsubstantiated by US intelligence, denied by the Czech government, and that Atta’s location had been confirmed by the FBI to be elsewhere, that particular bullet was dropped entirely from our ‘advice on things to say’ to senior Pentagon officials when they met with guests or outsiders.

All of this would seem to indicate that Shulsky’s talking points made use of intelligence gathered from dubious sources, and in many cases continued to rely on this long after it had been proven to be inaccurate or fabricated. This challenges Wolfowitz’s characterisation of this intelligence as ‘convincing’; very little of the information collected from the INC-recruited informants has proven accurate. As one commentator has argued,

information from Iraqi defectors made available by Ahmed Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress before the US invasion of Iraq was of little or no use, a Pentagon

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75 Lang, “Drinking the Kool-Aid”.
76 Lang, “Drinking the Kool-Aid”.
77 Lang, “Drinking the Kool-Aid”.
78 Kwiatkowski, “The New Pentagon Papers”.
79 Kwiatkowski, “The New Pentagon Papers”.
intelligence review shows... The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) said defectors introduced to US intelligence agents by the organisation invented or exaggerated their claims to have personal knowledge of the regime and its alleged weapons of mass destruction... The DIA review... makes clear that no more than a third of the information was potentially useful, and efforts to explore even these leads were generally unproductive.\(^8\)

This too appears to be consistent with the ‘strategic denial and deception’ advocated by Shulsky. The OSP’s reliance on intelligence sources and material which had already been discredited or disproved is consistent with the notion that it was the adoption of a particular view that was the goal of the Straussian’s intervention into the realm of intelligence. According to Shulsky, such denial and deception is acceptable, not to say desirable, in the service of realising a preconceived policy aim determined by policy makers.

The implication of all of this seems to be that the Straussian intervention into to realm of intelligence reflects the writings and prescriptions of Wolfowitz, Shulsky and Schmitt, and follows the premise derived from Strauss’ thought that intelligence is necessarily politicised, as objectivity cannot be attained. As in the social sciences, objectivity in the sphere of intelligence production is impossible in the Straussian logic, hence the practices of the Kentian positivist methodologies are circumvented or rejected. The Straussian interventions in intelligence production follow the rationale that in the absence of objectivity, all that remains is the pursuit of intelligence conducive to policymakers’ interests. As Cannistraro seems to corroborate, “the environment was conditioned in such a way that the analyst subtly leaned toward the conceits of the policymakers.”\(^8\) The practices of stovepiping, the reliance on unreliable groups and individuals for information, the insistence of including allegations and claims which had been shown conclusively to be manifestly inaccurate all reflect this. If objective truth is always already impossible, as it is for the Straussians, such a disregard is to be expected; all that remains is the generation of opinion conducive to policymakers’ agendas. This reflects the point that highly politicised intelligence production is explicitly sanctioned in the work of the Straussians, as the above has demonstrated; as Shulsky reiterates, “why fight it out on policy grounds if one can win my manipulating the intelligence product and arrogating its aura for one’s position?”\(^8\)

While Shulsky’s recommendation of such manipulation may lead one to infer that the Straussian project is closely related to misleading or lying, something even greater may be at stake. What this appears to entail is not the telling of lies but, rather, the production of truth, the production of a ‘regime’, the values, opinions, beliefs, in short, a mode of life wherein


\(^{81}\) Cited in Lang, “Drinking the Kool-Aid”.

\(^{82}\) Shulsky, “What is Intelligence?” p. 27.
what appears to be truth is determined by those involved in the formation of such opinion. Where objective truth is impossible, generating that which masquerades as truth, the production of the regime, becomes the central goal. It is this that underpins the Straussian intervention in the realm of intelligence; as Shulsky confirms, “intelligence can never forget that... truth is not the goal, only a means toward victory.”83 These interventions thus reflect the Straussian response to the abyss, i.e. the creation of opinion via the reason of the strongest. This does not, as part II will show, amount to the only possible response to this condition.

The Straussian Intervention in the Realm of Think Tanks and the Invasion of Iraq

Alongside their involvement in intelligence production, many of the Straussians were closely associated with think tanks and special interest organisations, which helped provide both platforms and resources to enable an intervention into popular understandings and perceptions about the question of Iraq. The Straussians’ involvement in such institutions includes both membership in existing ones and the founding of new ones. In the first case, there are several noteworthy think tanks and interest organisations which have facilitated a Straussian intervention. One example is the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), with which Schmitt, Wolfowitz and Mansfield are associated. Also significant is the support received by the Straussians from the RAND Corporation, for which Fukuyama and Shulsky have worked, the Carnegie Endowment, with which Kristol is associated and who have reprinted several of his Weekly Standard articles on their website, the National Strategy Information Centre, with which Shulsky, Schmitt, and Wolfowitz have had dealings in their efforts to reconfigure the culture of the intelligence production sphere, and finally the Hudson Institute, with which Fukuyama is affiliated.

More significant in terms of discerning specifically Straussian influence in this context are those think tanks and interest groups established and run by Straussians. There are at least two relevant organisations headed by the Straussians discussed here, PNAC and the Claremont Institute.

83 Shulsky and Schmitt, Silent Warfare, p. 176.
PNAC was founded 1997 by Kristol and Kagan. Kristol held the position of Chairman, while Schmitt was its Executive Director. It had close connections to the American Enterprise Institute, operating from the fifth floor of its Washington headquarters,\(^84\) to which many of its members migrated following PNAC’s closure in 2006. As Schmitt, who was one such member, explained, “when the project started, it was not intended to go forever. That is why we are shutting it down. We would have had to spend too much time raising money for it.” He continues, significantly, that anyway “it has already done its job... Our view has been adopted.”\(^85\) The ‘job’ he refers to can be understood as providing a platform for a broader neoconservative agenda relating to US foreign policy, of which the Strausians comprised a powerful dimension, founded as it was by Kristol along with Kagan, and boasting members including Schmitt, Wolfowitz and Fukuyama. Indeed, its homepage confirms this:

PNAC intends, through issuing briefs, research papers, advocacy journalism, conferences, and seminars, to explain what American world leadership entails. It will also strive to rally support for a vigorous and principled policy of international involvement and to stimulate useful public debate on foreign and defense policy and America’s role in the world.\(^86\)

This suggests that it was PNAC’s purpose to stage events, support publications and put pressure on the government in the service of particular policy aims. According to their website, PNAC did just that vis-a-vis Iraq. In its list of affiliated publications are included two major books, Kaplan and Kristol’s *The War over Iraq* and Kagan and Kristol’s *Present Dangers*, as well as various reports including “Iraq: Setting the Record Straight”, and “Rebuilding America’s Defenses”. It also provides an extensive list of articles published in various newspapers and project reports, a large proportion of which were authored by Schmitt and Kristol, on the topic of Iraq and the broader Middle East.

It is also highly noteworthy that the memoranda circulated to members by Kristol are sent, the website shows, to ‘opinion leaders’, echoing Strauss’ use of the concept of ‘salutary opinion’. This would seem to suggest Kristol’s awareness of the interventionary nature of the institution; its members are identified as directors or leaders of opinions, presumably of the salutary variety. This ethos of intervention is reaffirmed in PNAC’s ‘Statement of Principles’, which is signed by Fukuyama and Wolfowitz, among others. It begins “American foreign and defense policy is adrift,” and continues, “we aim to change this.”\(^87\)

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\(^84\) Jim Lobe, “Iraq: The Schemers have their way,” *The Asia Times*, July 17\(^{th}\), 2003.


\(^86\) PNAC, Homepage, http://www.newamericancentury.org/.

While PNAC can be seen as overtly oriented towards impacting exclusively upon foreign policy debate and decisions, the Claremont Institute’s mission is broader in scope. According to its website, its purpose is “to restore the principles of the American Founding to their rightful, preeminent authority in our national life.” The Institute was founded by four of Jaffa’s students, themselves associated with Straussianism, in 1979 in California, and he remains the key figure of the organisation, holding the position of Distinguished Fellow and posting regular articles and commentaries. It publishes the *Claremont Review of Books*, which has included contributions from Mansfield among others, and has also published books by Jaffa and other scholars, as well as republishing articles from Kristol’s *Weekly Standard* on its website. It also runs a number of fellowship and internship programs, providing access to academic and governmental establishments. In addition to this, it “administers a variety of public policy programs, including Americans for Victory over Terrorism (AVOT),” among others. AVOT was founded in 2002 and was highly active during the period leading up to the invasion of Iraq, although, like PNAC, it seems to have ceased to operate in recent years. Much like the ‘job’ of PNAC, the Claremont Institute is explicit about its goal regarding AVOT. The Institute’s website states:

AVOT is dedicated to victory in the War on Terrorism. Through the shaping of public opinion, the encouragement of a foreign policy based on the founding principles of America, increased research about Islam and Islamism, and a steadfast commitment to attacking those who would blame America first, AVOT will work toward victory in this first great war of the 21st century.

As with the mission statement of PNAC, of note here is the emphasis on ‘shaping public opinion’.

Just as with the sphere of intelligence production, the Straussians’ intervention into the sphere of think tanks/interest groups began in earnest immediately following the 9/11 attacks, and reflects similar concerns and themes. The first of these themes relates to the relationship between Saddam Hussein, terrorism and WMDs. On September 20th 2001, an open letter was sent by PNAC to President Bush, the signatories of which included Kristol, Fukuyama, and Schmitt. The letter begins, that they “write to endorse your commitment to ‘lead the world to victory’ in the war against terrorism.” They proceed to argue that “in order to carry out this first war of the 21st century successfully... a key goal, but by no means the only goal... should be to capture or kill Osama bin Laden, and to destroy his network of

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88 “About the Claremont Institute,” http://www.claremont.org/about.
90 “About the Claremont Institute,” http://www.claremont.org/about.
associates."\textsuperscript{93} Immediately following this, they turn to the question of Iraq, stating that “Saddam Hussein is one of the leading terrorists on the face of the Earth.”\textsuperscript{94} What is noteworthy here is that rather than claiming simply that Saddam Hussein had links to terrorism, as they do elsewhere, for instance in a 2002 open letter to the President in which they claim that Saddam Hussein “is a funder and supporter or terrorism... and maintains links to the Al Qaeda network,”\textsuperscript{95} here they assert that Saddam is himself a terrorist, part of the terrorism problem. As with the attempts of conjoin the disparate notions of Iraq and terrorism in intelligence production, this clearly shows an attempt to conflate the two, to render them indistinct by applying the category ‘terrorist’ to Saddam Hussein.

Similarly, in the second open letter sent to the President, the signatories, who included Kristol and Schmitt, again attempt to extend the parameters of the ‘terrorist’ by asserting “one spoke of the terrorist network consists of Yasser Arafat and the leadership of the Palestinian Authority.”\textsuperscript{96} The conflation of the Palestinian struggle with the 9/11 attackers serves, as with the collapsing of the distinction between Saddam Hussein and terrorism, and the conjoining of the notions of WMD and terrorism into ‘weapons of mass terror’, to discursively erode the conceptual distinction between the two, resulting in all of these disparate notions subsumed beneath the heading of ‘terrorism’, a label which serves to immediately delegitimate and depoliticise.

As with the interventions into the political, intelligence and media realms, there is a clear attempt in the realm of think tanks/interest institutions to conflate the threat of Iraq and terrorism with the question of WMDs. This is shown, for instance, in the letter to Bush regarding Israel:

we urge you to accelerate plans for removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. As you have said, every day that Saddam Hussein remains in power brings closer the day the terrorists will have not just airplanes with which to attack us, but chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons, as well.\textsuperscript{97}

A related theme central to the intervention in this realm is the question of Iraqi complicity in 9/11 and the notion of evidence. This too is explored in the terrorism letter; it states that

it may be that the Iraqi government provided assistance in some form to the recent attack on the United States. But even if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the

\textsuperscript{93} PNAC, Letter to President Bush on Terrorism.  
\textsuperscript{94} PNAC, Letter to President Bush on Terrorism.  
\textsuperscript{96} PNAC, Letter to President Bush on Israel.  
\textsuperscript{97} PNAC, Letter to President Bush on Israel.
attack, any strategy aiming at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq.\textsuperscript{98} The important point here is that the signatories argue that Iraq ought to be targeted and Saddam removed even in the absence of any evidence linking him to the 9/11 attacks. This might suggest that the need for proof was not a primary concern for the Straussians at this stage; they were keen to proceed with an invasion without it. That evidence was not a vital condition for the Straussians should come as no surprise in light of the problematisation of the possibility of objectivity and the politicisation of intelligence explored above.

There are instances in which connections are identifiable between issues raised in the realm of intelligence production and those circulating in the sphere of think tanks, specifically relating to Shulsky’s talking points. In a PNAC report of 2005, for instance, reference is made to the question of the aluminium tubes which the OSP insisted were intended for use in Iraq’s nuclear weapons program.\textsuperscript{99} Citing a report by Department of State’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research, the authors conceded that “the tubes are not intended for use in Iraq’s nuclear weapon program,” and further that “the activities we have detected do not, however, add up to a compelling case that Iraq is currently pursuing what INR would consider to be an integrated and comprehensive approach to acquire nuclear weapons.”\textsuperscript{100} In spite of this, the authors insist on emphasising that “Saddam continues to want nuclear weapons,” and that “Baghdad is pursuing at least a limited effort to maintain and acquire nuclear weapons.”\textsuperscript{101} Similarly there is, in the same document, a reference to concerns “regarding ‘foreign procurement’ and access to ‘fissile material’.”\textsuperscript{102} It is perhaps not to infer too much to suggest that this may be a reference to the alleged attempt of Saddam Hussein to purchase yellowcake from Niger discussed above. To invoke this as a reason why concern about Iraq’s nuclear ambitions should be maintained cannot be deemed anything other than highly problematic, given the conclusive refutation of these claims outlined above. That this was being invoked as late as 2005 by PNAC members serves again to highlight their indifference to evidence.

Similarly, the question of the Prague meeting of Atta and an Iraqi intelligence official appears in a memorandum sent by Schmitt to ‘opinion leaders’ in PNAC. In relation to the growing belief in a connection between Iraq and al Qaeda, he asserts that “of particular interest in this context, of course, is whether Mohammad Atta, the leader of the September 11 hijackers, met with an Iraqi intelligence agent in Prague prior to the attack... ‘the White

\textsuperscript{98} PNAC, Letter to President Bush on Terrorism.
\textsuperscript{100} PNAC, “Iraq: Setting the Record Straight,” p. 32.
\textsuperscript{101} PNAC, “Iraq: Setting the Record Straight,” p. 32.
\textsuperscript{102} PNAC, “Iraq: Setting the Record Straight,” p. 32.
House is now backing claims’ that the meeting in fact took place.” The operation of internal memoranda such as this at PNAC is noteworthy, firstly because as mentioned above the recipients are listed as ‘opinion leaders’, but also because they illustrate that during this period there was a culture between members of the sharing of pieces of information, often just a few lines long, which made a convincing case about an issue relating to Iraq. They often begin by the sender, usually Kristol or Schmitt, stating that he wants to ‘draw your attention’ to the point made, as though the piece of information might be useful. These memoranda are numerous, as is clear from the PNAC website. This further reinforces the idea that the Straussians endeavoured to direct the formation of opinion in order to create the appearance of truth; the ‘opinion leaders’ at PNAC circulated and emphasised pieces of information conducive to their policy aims. Perceptible here is the generation of opinion and meaning.

A concurrent theme raised in this realm which is consistent with interventions on intelligence production relates to the support of the Straussians for Chalabi and the INC. Again, just as was the case in the intelligence realm, the Straussians involved in PNAC argued that “the United States must therefore provide full military and financial support to the Iraqi opposition... American forces must be prepared to back up our commitment to the Iraqi opposition by all necessary means.” The ‘opposition’ referred to here is the INC, comprising as it did at that time an overarching term for the organised anti-Saddam movement. Also worth noting here is the involvement of Chalabi in a number of right wing think tanks and interest groups since the 1990s. As Halper and Clarke comment, “Chalabi gained political favor with Washington’s staunch pro-Israeli think tanks, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) and JINSA,” the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs. In their estimation, these groups contributed significantly to Chalabi’s integration into the neo-conservative movement: “he became a frequent guest at their [the think tanks’] symposia and drew wide support from key figures with neo-conservative connections, such as Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and Woolsey.”

A final dimension of the intervention in this sphere relates to the question of the curtailing of civil liberties in the name of victory in the fight against terrorism. In a published letter sent to Congress by AVOT on 24th September 2004, which was signed by Schmitt among others, the signatories state that they write “to express our strong support for the

104 PNAC, Letter to President Bush on Terrorism.
105 Halper and Clarke, America Alone, p. 220
106 Halper and Clarke, America Alone, p. 220.
USA Patriot Act,” and for the “necessary legal tools it provides to battle al-Qaeda and our other terrorist enemies,” They continue that vital sections of the Patriot Act, such as information-sharing provisions, will expire in 2005. For the security and safety of the American people, no provision of the Patriot Act should expire. Moreover, the temporary provisions should be made permanent. This shows that in the realm of think tanks and interest groups, as in intelligence, the Straussians intervened in order to shape ideas relating to the invasion of Iraq in a manner which reflects Strauss’ prescriptions vis-a-vis the construction and dissemination of opinions according to the will of the strongest.

The Straussian Intervention into the Realm of the Media and the Invasion of Iraq

In conjunction with their activities in the sphere of intelligence production and think tanks, the Straussians enacted interventions in the media, thereby further disseminating the opinions constructed. In this context in particular, the themes of the friend/enemy opposition and the regime, including tyranny, are clearly in evidence, and their intervention can be read as attempting to impose a version of events conducive to policy-making interests, i.e. in line with the logic of the reason of the strongest.

Just as Wolfowitz, Shulsky and Schmitt had longstanding ideas about the role intelligence could play in the service of policy makers, so too did Kristol regarding the scope and impact the media could have on shaping the opinions and beliefs of society. As Dorrien puts it, just as Irving Kristol’s generation of neo-cons believed they could do great things if they advocated the right ideas, and the New York intellectuals of the 1930s believed it before them, Bill Kristol exuded the neo-con belief in the power of ideas. He also claims elsewhere that Kristol understood the significance of “the battle of ideas,” and states that “Perle aptly observed that Kristol offered ‘an example of opinion leadership –

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108 AVOT, Letter to Congress.
110 Dorrien, Imperial Designs, p. 126
formulating ideas in a way that would eventually connect with a much broader audience’." As Kristol himself has commented, in terms of realising policy aims, “it’s really about educating the public right.”

Such an education was offered by the Straussian’s involved in the realm of the media, most significantly Kristol and Mansfield, as well as Schmitt and Wolfowitz, predominantly through the Rupert Murdoch-owned Weekly Standard and the Fox network. Halper and Clarke suggest that, despite running at a financial loss, the magazine continues to be produced and circulated because it has “succeeded in a main purpose, namely to provide legitimacy for Kristol and other staffers in their role as ‘experts’ on Fox and MSNBC television where Weekly Standard contributors have become recognized faces. These platforms,” they continue, “have, in turn, allowed neo-conservatives to establish themselves as experts providing an important perspective on the major networks’ Sunday talk shows.” According to Dorrien, as well as appearing on “Good Morning America, The Week with David Brinkley, and The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, later he [Kristol] transcended even fixture status on Fox News.” Mansfield has also made many appearances on Fox and PBS network programs.

The Straussian intervention into the media sphere can be seen to be comprised of several related dimensions. Significantly, just as the Straussian’s in the realm of intelligence production and think tanks had propounded a version of events in which a connection between Saddam Hussein, weapons of mass destruction, and the 9/11 attacks existed, so too did the Straussian’s in the media. This began, as with the other interventions, immediately following 9/11. Lobe cites Kristol as having argued on National Public Radio on the evening of the attacks itself:

I think Iraq is, actually, the big, unspoken sort of elephant in the room today. There’s a fair amount of evidence that Iraq has had very close associations with Osama bin Laden in the past, a lot of evidence that it had associations with the previous effort to destroy the World Trade Center [in 1993].

As Dorrien explains,

111 Dorrien, Imperial Designs, p. 179. This seems to perhaps be connected to the point made by the Straussian’s operating in the realm of intelligence production that those directing the formation of ideas should be aware of the targets’ predispositions and tendencies to ensure that the desired effect is realised, a point linked to Strauss’ ideas surrounding the direction of opinion by those with ‘creative minds’.
113 Halper and Clarke, America Alone, p. 188.
114 Halper and Clarke, America Alone, pp 187-188.
115 Dorrien, Imperial Designs, p. 126.
the Weekly Standard made no pretense of concentrating on the terrorists who actually attacked the U.S., which smacked of mere police action... [F]rom the beginning Kristol and Kagan hunted bigger game, urging that al Qaeda was just the beginning of a war against terrorism and not its most important part.117

Indeed only a few weeks after the 9/11 attacks, Kagan and Kristol claimed that

the high-grade anthrax popping up around the country suggests that the same terrorists who destroyed the World Trade Centre also acquired a biological weapon too sophisticated to have been concocted in a Trenton basement or an Afghan cave... Iraq may well have been the supplier. If this proved true, the Bush administration will have no choice but to embark on an effort to remove the man who easily qualifies – anthrax or no anthrax – as the world’s most dangerous dictator.118

Similarly in his book co-authored with Lawrence Kaplan, Kristol argues that

the United States also has been affected by Iraqi-sponsored acts of terror... U.S. officials now believe there are hundreds of al Qaeda cadres operating in Iraq... we do know that Saddam is a terrorist.119

Here, not only is a direct interrelation between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda claimed but it is also implied that the two are not even distinct, that the former is a terrorist. This casting of Saddam Hussein as a terrorist serves to broaden the already vast parameters of who the ‘terrorist’ in contemporary narratives can be and works to depoliticise and render unintelligible the recipient of the label. It also correlates closely with the project of opinion formation immanent to Straussianism.

During the period of the development of the OSP and its intelligence production activities, Kristol placed a strong emphasis on the dangers of the combined threats posed by Iraq, terrorism and WMDs in the Weekly Standard. In one article, he argued that “Iraq is the threat and the supreme test of whether we as a nation have learned the lesson of September 11.”120 He continues,

but after September 11, we have all been forced to consider another scenario. What if Saddam provides some of his anthrax, or his XV, or a nuclear device to a terrorist group like al Qaeda? Saddam could help a terrorist inflict a horrific attack on the United States or its allies... To this day we don’t know who provided the anthrax for the post-September 11 attacks. We may never know for sure.121

As Dorrien notes, Kristol argued immediately following 9/11: “last week we lost more than 6000 Americans to terrorism. How many more could we lose in a world where Saddam Hussein continues to thrive and continues his quest for weapons of mass destruction?”122 In

119 Kaplan and Kristol, The War over Iraq, p. 24
121 Kagan and Kristol, “What to do about Iraq?”
a similar manner, along with co-author Robert Kagan, Kristol argued that “not to take on Saddam would ensure that regimes implicated in terror and developing weapons of mass destruction will be a constant – and growing – feature of our world.”125 They continue:

[it is predicted that] Iraq will have three nuclear bombs by 2005. But that may be too optimistic. Before the Gulf War no one had a clue how far advanced Saddam’s nuclear weapons program was... even with an intrusive inspections regime, ‘Iraq might be able to construct a nuclear explosive before it was detected’. Today, no one knows how close Saddam is to having a nuclear device. What we do know is that every month that passes brings him closer to the prize.124

The Straussians in the media were, thus, quick disseminate the conceptual conjoining of the threats posed by terrorism, Saddam Hussein and WMDs.

Wolfowitz also contributed to disseminating the connection in the public realm. He stated in 2003:

our successes in recent months in capturing terrorists demonstrate clearly that the effort we have mobilized at the same time to disarm Iraq of its weapons of mass terror has not distracted us from the hunt for al Qaeda. But make no mistake; these are not two separate issues. Disarming Saddam’s weapons of mass terror is a second front in the war on terrorism.125

As well as his concurrence with Kristol that the issues were not separate, what is especially noteworthy here is Wolfowitz’s use of the new term ‘weapons of mass terror’ as a substitute for the usual ‘weapons of mass destruction’. This shift in the language operates to conceptually conjoin the separate phenomena of WMDs and terrorism, distilling the two into a single notion. When using this phraseology in the context of challenging Iraq, it functions to allow Wolfowitz to deal with only two rather than three disparate notions. No longer do Iraq, WMD and terrorism have to be thought of as separate but related questions, an argument having to be made for why they should be associated with each other, rather WMD and terrorism are collapsed into one, necessitating only a link being forged to Iraq. Furthermore, this conjoining reinforces the notion that terrorism and WMDs are linked in the sense that there is a danger of terrorists acquiring WMDs and using them against the US. This conjoining serves to render two of these indistinct in language, thereby generating desired ‘opinion’.

Strauss’ figure of the ‘regime’ resided at the heart of this process of opinion formation. Following the 9/11 attacks, the question of removing Saddam Hussein’s regime,

123 Kagan and Kristol, “What to do about Iraq?”.
124 Kagan and Kristol. “What to do about Iraq?”.
as well as linguistically connecting him with the Taliban is in evidence. Wolfowitz, for instance, stated in 2002:

Ousting Saddam, like ousting the Taliban, is only the first step in a long process. Everyone knows we can remove an evil regime. The question is, are we willing to expend the security, financial, diplomatic, and political resources to make the successor regime a success.\textsuperscript{126}

What is clear here is that Wolfowitz refers not only to the governmental infrastructure of Iraq but rather to its entire ‘regime’, which indicates that not only political but many other dimensions comprising it. Similarly, in 2003 Wolfowitz claimed, again conflating the disparate notions of terrorism and the Iraqi regime, that

despite their differences, the criminal remnants of Saddam's sadistic regime share a common goal with foreign terrorists – to bring about the failure of Iraqi reconstruction and take the country back to the sort of tyrannical prison from which it has just been freed.\textsuperscript{127}

In the same year he stated elsewhere, again diminishing the distance between the two concepts,

today’s enemy does not arrive with flags flying and bugles blaring. He does not announce his plans, or when and where he will strike. Today’s enemy is found in shadowy terrorist organizations and among the outlaw regimes that harbor them, that provide them training, and that supply them with weapons and money.\textsuperscript{128}

Mansfield also emphasises the connection relying upon the notion of the regime, claiming in 2003 that

The ‘war on terror’ and this war are one and the same. We should certainly pursue those regimes that use terrorism as well as the actual terrorists themselves. We should not relax to pursuing only the threat of al-Qaeda, for that are, by no means, the only threat. Terrorists themselves can be nourished and supported by regimes that, like Iraq, have regional ambitions and that share the terrorists’ hatred for Western civilization.\textsuperscript{129}

In the same interview, Mansfield also related the notion of the regime to WMDs:

Saddam Hussein’s regime is a direct threat. Saddam has developed weapons of mass destruction, and I think those weapons can only be aimed at us, either at our country, at our country’s interests, or at our country’s allies.\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{126} Paul Wolfowitz, “Afghanistan: Building Stability, Avoiding Chaos,” Hearing before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, June 26\textsuperscript{th}, 2002, p. 3.


\textsuperscript{130} Harvey C. Mansfield, cited in Turner, “The Experts Weigh In.”
Also in 2003, Jaffa utilised the term, asking, as cited above, in relation to Saddam Hussein’s 99% of the vote in the last elections in Iraq, “does that make his regime any less tyrannical?” Kristol seems to concur, claiming in the context of the invasion of Iraq in 2003: “The nature of the regime is crucial, rather than some alleged underlying, geographically or economically or culturally determined ‘national interest’. To cite Wolfowitz finally:

one thing is certain, and that is that this regime is on its way out... We’ve seen the brutality of this regime... and the sooner the Iraqi people understand that there’s no reason any longer to fear this regime and its leader – no reason to fight for it – the better it will be... there isn’t going to be any deal with this regime...

The notion of ‘regime change’ resides the heart of the Straussian interventions vis-a-vis Iraq. As early as 1996, Wolfowitz had articulated three possible options for dealing with it: “containment; engagement; regime change.” Halper and Clarke comment: a “provocative agenda, embracing pre-emption and ‘regime change’ in Iraq, became an integral part of the administration’s foreign policy in the wake of the terrorist attacks.” Similarly, Dorrien notes that “by mid-September 2002 the Weekly Standard was convinced that Bush had turned the corner toward regime change in Iraq.” This project of regime change entailed not only a change of government in Iraq but rather “involved a vast project for reengineering the political, cultural, economic and religious face of the Middle East.”

The important point here is that the term ‘regime’ and in particular ‘regime change’ became central to the political narratives surrounding the question of Iraq; as Lenzner and Kristol’s note, “President Bush’s advocacy of ‘regime change’... is a not altogether unworthy product of Strauss’ rehabilitation of the notion of regime.

Relatedly, the notion of the ‘tyrannous’ regime is central here. As early as 1992, for example, Fukuyama mobilises the term in his discussion of “those tyrants who have risen among us like Hitler, Stalin, or Saddam Hussein.” Similarly, in 1996, Wolfowitz claimed that “...Iraq is run by a tyrant who terrorizes his own people and his neighbours...” By

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134 Solomon, Paul D. Wolfowitz, p. 69.
135 Halper and Clarke, America Alone, p. 149.
136 Dorrien, Imperial Designs, p. 168.
137 Halper and Clarke, America Alone, p. 202. While I would submit that all of these dimensions already comprise ‘the political’, it is useful here to make the distinction in order to demonstrate the scope of the intended intervention and also to reinforce the notion that for the Straussians, the ‘regime’ entails all of these politicised dimensions of society.
138 Lenzner and Kristol, “What was Leo Strauss up to?” p. 38.
139 Fukuyama, The End of History, p 190.
1998, his use of the term was no less apparent; he claimed for instance, in an blog entry on the 18th September entitled “Liberating the Iraqi people from Saddam’s tyranny”, that the US ought to establish a policy which would “aim at liberating the Iraqi people from Saddam’s tyrannical grasp.” Following the 9/11 attacks, the use of the term seems to have proliferated in the publications and speeches of the Straussians discussed here in relation to Saddam Hussein. A month after the attacks, for instance, Schmitt argued that

the Iraqi dictator has made it known time and again that the ‘mother of all battles’ continues. And, like all tyrants of his maniacal stripe, he seeks not only to hold onto power but to claim a place in history. In a similar manner, Kristol, along with Kagan, claimed in 2002 that

a devastating knockout blow against Saddam Hussein, followed by an American-sponsored effort to rebuild Iraq and put it on a path toward democratic governance, would have a seismic impact on the Arab world – for the better. The Arab world may take a long time coming to terms with the West, but that process will be hastened by the defeat of the leading anti-western tyrant. Concurrently, Jaffa emphasised the association between Saddam Hussein and tyranny, arguing in February 2003 that

Saddam Hussein recently held an election in which he received over 99% of the vote. Does that make him democratically elected? Does that make his regime any less tyrannical?

Interestingly, the concept of tyranny appeared to enjoy even wider purchase when, during the early part of 2005, of the new idea of a ‘War on Tyranny’ emerged. According to F. William Engdahl, in February of that year, many individuals at the heart of the Bush administration had

begun to make a significant shift in the rhetoric of war. A new ‘War on Tyranny’ is being groomed to replace the outmoded War on Terror. Far from being a semantic nuance, the shift is highly revealing of the next phase of Washington’s global agenda.

Like Wolfowitz conjoining of the concept of WMD and terrorism to form ‘weapons of mass terror’, this serves to illustrate the Straussian mobilisation of language in the media as part of their generation of opinion and meaning in society.

143 Kagan and Kristol, “What to do about Iraq?”
144 Jaffa, “American Conservatism and the Present Crisis.”
A further theme shared by the Straussians intervening in the realms of intelligence and the media is their mutual backing and use of Chalabi and the INC. Kristol and his co-author Kagan voiced their confidence in the INC in the *Weekly Standard*: “The United States should support Ahmad Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress – they are essential parts of any solution in Iraq.”\(^{146}\) Furthermore, it seems as though the Straussians in the media, just as in the intelligence sphere, utilised information the INC provided:

What we do know is that Saddam is an ally to the world’s terrorists and always has been. Reliable defectors and former U.N. weapons inspectors have confirmed the existence of a terrorist training camp in Iraq, complete with a Boeing 707 for practicing hijacks, and filled with non-Iraqi radical Muslims.\(^{147}\)

Significantly, this claim also appeared in a *Weekly Standard* article written by Schmitt: “there are Iraqi defectors who claim to have seen radical Muslims at a special terrorist training site in Iraq where trainees learn, among other things, to hijack airplanes.”\(^{148}\) As mentioned above, this claim comprised one of the talking points overseen by Shulsky. This assertion was based at least in part on two interviews which aired on PBS in November 2001, the interviewees at which turned out to be frauds. Nevertheless, despite the doubts which were apparent in 2002, Kristol and Kagan seemed content to invoke the stories of these ‘reliable’ defectors.

In some instances, there appears to be a possible link between the material produced in the realm of intelligence and the publications of the Straussians in the media sphere. One interesting example of this is an article published in Kristol’s *Standard* claiming to be based on a leaked ‘secret government memo’ which detailed the relationship between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. The author claims that

Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein had an operational relationship from the early 1990s to 2003 that involved training in explosives and weapons of mass destruction, logistical support for terrorist attacks, al Qaeda training camps and safe haven in Iraq, and Iraqi financial support for al Qaeda – perhaps even for Mohamed Atta – according to a top secret US government memorandum obtained by the *Weekly Standard*... The picture that emerges is one of a history of collaboration between two of America’s most determined and dangerous enemies.\(^{149}\)

The article states that the memo “lays out the intelligence in 50 numbered points.”\(^{150}\) It is possible that these points were connected to or even an example of the talking points outlined above, or even if not, it at least suggests that information may have been leaked from the OSP which found its way into the pages of the *Weekly Standard*. All of the claims

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150. Hayes, “Case Closed”.
made in the document were subsequently shown to be false but Kristol continued to assert their accuracy in the *Standard*.$^{151}$

A further example of this relates to the claim derived from the INC that an Iraqi intelligence official had met Mohamed Atta in Prague, which as shown above, was quickly proven to be untrue by the FBI and the Czech government. Kristol and Kagan also disseminated this in the *Weekly Standard*:

> We know, too, that Mohamed Atta, the ringleader of September 11, went out of his way to meet an Iraqi intelligence official a few months before he flew a plane into the World Trade Centre.$^{152}$

Schmitt, too, publicised this claim, stating in the *Weekly Standard* shortly after the 9/11 attacks,

> In June 2000, Mohamed Atta... met with a senior Iraqi intelligence official. This was no chance encounter. Rather than take a flight from Germany, where he had been living, Atta travelled to Prague, almost certainly for the purpose of meeting there with Iraqi intelligence operative Ahmed Samir Ahani.$^{153}$

He elaborates that “Atta would never have met with an Iraqi intelligence officer unless the Iraqi had been in some way in on the operation,”$^{154}$ the operation being the 9/11 attacks. “Because,” he explains, “the United States is now engaged not in legal wrangling but in a deadly game of espionage and terrorism... the Prague meeting is about as clear and convincing as evidence gets.”$^{155}$ While further examples of the dissemination of such accounts could be given, this suggests that the Straussians in the media worked to the same sheet of music as those in the realm of intelligence in the dissemination of opinion conducive to particular interests.

A related dimension to the Straussian intervention into the media concerns the question of the how the enemy faced ought to be understood. Mansfield adds to the debate by focusing not only on emphasising the nature or scope of the threat faced but the implications of it in relation to US society. According to Mansfield, a year after the 9/11 attacks, one of the lessons to be learnt is that

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$^{152}$ Kagan and Kristol, “What to do about Iraq?”

$^{153}$ Schmitt, “Why Iraq?”

$^{154}$ Schmitt, “Why Iraq?”

$^{155}$ Schmitt, “Why Iraq?”
our dominant opinion of multiculturalism doesn’t seem to have worked out... Multiculturalism means that all cultures can be included in a community, and this attack on 9/11 seems to be a grand challenge to that happy notion. Here, these people are not just others whom we can understand if we look hard at them and see that underneath them they’re really like us. No, they’re different from us. They’re our enemies.  

This notion of multicultural harmony has, then, been undermined by the 9/11 attacks according to Mansfield, and in its place is growing “a movement, I would say, from multiculturalism to a feeling of patriotism, which is a sentiment that is hard to justify, but somehow indispensable in emergencies.” Mansfield encourages the formation of a popular perception that both that the ‘enemy’ is fundamentally different from US citizens and that a recognition of this pertains to a shift away from multiculturalism towards patriotism. Kristol, too, emphasised the importance of the development of a spirit of patriotism; as Dorrien notes, he called for “a resurgence of patriotic liberalism.”  

This seems to reflect the emphasis on the closed society and the friend/enemy binary Strauss deemed central to the concept of the political; the rendering of the enemy here functions within the systems of binaries explored above. 

This logic of encouraging morally loaded sentiment by means of which to generate opinion relates to a further theme of the Straussian intervention into the media sphere, the question of the conduct of the Bush administration as regards domestic surveillance. In the Weekly Standard, Mansfield argues that given the context of the dangers posed to the US, the executive should not be criticised for exercising ‘extra-legal’ means in defence of the nation. He claims that to mount a defence of the administration’s activities, as he attempts to do, “one can begin from the fact that the American Constitution made the first republic with a strong executive. A strong executive is one that is not confined to executing the laws but has extra-legal powers.” He continues: “to confirm the extra-legal character of the presidency, the Constitution has him take an oath not to execute the laws but to execute the office of president, which is larger.” This means, he claims, that “it is wrong to accuse President Bush of acting illegally in the surveillance of possible enemies, as that were a crime and legality is all that matters.” Reflecting Strauss’ engagement with Machiavelli, Mansfield asserts that, in the latter’s view, “ordinary power needs to be supplemented or corrected by the extraordinary power of a prince, using wise discretion. ‘Necessity knows no law’ is a maxim everyone admits, and takes advantage of, when in need.” He concedes that “wise direction opens the door to unwise direction. But,” he concludes, “there is no way to draw a line between the wise and the unwise without making a law (or something like it) and thus
returning to the inflexibility of the rule of law. We need both the rule of law and the power to escape it.”

This can be read as an attempt to intervene on behalf of the administration in the sense of providing a (pseudo-) philosophical explanation for their infringements of laws relating to the surveillance of individuals. He also comments that “in the present administration, we do not really need to know the sort of secrets we learn from reporters like Bob Woodward.” Here, Mansfield seems to suggest that the public should not be concerned with the details of governing, up to and including whether or not the government acts legally or otherwise. This reading is supported by his answer to the question of whether or not we should be prepared to sacrifice some of the civil liberties guaranteed in the Constitution: “I think we have to be. I think that civil liberties really change their focus from the liberties of a minority to the liberties of a majority.” In addition he agrees with the expansion of executive privilege rather than individual privilege. All of this seems to reflect a tendency to generate and disseminate opinion, and an encouragement of docility and passivity in the populace, something explicitly encouraged by Strauss.

A corresponding dimension of the Straussians’ intervention into the media relates to the question of the possible US responses to the threat. In response to the suggestion that Iraq could be dealt with by predominantly using aerial attacks, Kagan and Kristol assert that they “doubt [this]... can be counted on as sufficient for Iraq.” They reiterate:

We cannot count on the Iraqi opposition to win this war. Nor can we count on precision bombing and US Special Forces alone to do the job. American ground forces in significant number are likely to be required for success in Iraq.

This is because of the “special problem posed by Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction. Any attack on Iraq must succeed quickly [because] Saddam will be sorely tempted to launch a chemical or biological attack on one of his neighbors, probably Israel.” Importantly, they are explicit that such an attack of significant numbers of ground troops is necessary also because

the best way to avoid chaos and anarchy in Iraq after Saddam is removed is to have a powerful American occupying force in place, with a clear intention of sticking around for a while... The United States will have to make a long-term commitment to

160 Mansfield, “The Law and the President”
161 Mansfield, “Then and Now”
162 Mansfield, “Then and Now”
163 Kagan and Kristol, “What to do about Iraq?”
164 Kagan and Kristol, “What to do about Iraq?”
165 Kagan and Kristol, “What to do about Iraq?”
rebuilding Iraq, and that commitment cannot be fulfilled without U.S. troops on the ground.\textsuperscript{166}

All of this points to the suggestion, made above, that the invasion of Iraq pertained to more than simply the removal of the dictatorial government. As Kagan and Kristol themselves confirm,

ultimately, what we do or do not do in the coming months about Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq will decisively affect our future security. And it will determine more than that. Whether or not we remove Saddam Hussein from power will shape the contours of the emerging world order, perhaps for decades to come. Either it will be a world order conducive to out liberal democratic principles and our safety, or it will be one where brutal, well-armed tyrants are allowed to hold democracy and international security hostage.\textsuperscript{167}

Along with Lawrence Kaplan, Kristol indicates one dimension of what this post-Saddam world order might look like: “Iraq could even replace Saudi Arabia as the key American ally and source of oil in the region.”\textsuperscript{168} This shows that the Straussians intervened in the media sphere with a view to realising a significant US military occupation for a considerable period of time, in a manner reflecting Strauss’ invocation of the concept of the ‘regime’, of restructuring the country politically, socially, and culturally, rather than simply removing Saddam Hussein from power.

In summary, this suggests that the Straussians intervened in the realm of the media in order to influence or direct popular opinions surrounding the nature of the threat faced in the post-9/11 world, the severity of this threat, the social implications and consequences of this threat, the measures necessary at home to defend against it, the viable courses of action to be taken to counter it, and the correctness of their broader global aspirations. As with the interventions into the spheres of intelligence and think tanks, an understanding of the productive dimensions of ideas and the generation of meaning in the absence of objectivity underpins this. It thus can be read as engaging with the processes of opinion construction and dissemination explicitly propounded by Strauss, predicated upon the distinction between friends and enemies, and a focus on the tyranny of certain regimes.

\textsuperscript{166} Kagan and Kristol, “What to do about Iraq?”
\textsuperscript{167} Kagan and Kristol, “What to do about Iraq?”
\textsuperscript{168} Kaplan and Kristol, \textit{The War over Iraq}, p. 99.
Conclusion to Part I

It is my contention that the political philosophy of Leo Strauss is discernable in the interventions of these Straussians during the period leading up to the invasion of Iraq in the spheres of intelligence production, think tanks, and the media. It has been posited, by Drury for example, that this relates to the telling of lies by the Straussians, and in particular their connection to the Platonic Noble Lie. She claims that Strauss’ political philosophy was predicated upon “offering the city a concoction of noble lies and pious frauds,” and that it “cultivates an unprincipled elite whose lies are intended for others.”\textsuperscript{169} Similarly, Jim George notes that, for Strauss and the Straussians, “the telling of ‘noble lies’ becomes something of an imperative, justified by the need to effectively engage those outside of the elite inner circle...”\textsuperscript{170} While I would not disagree that the Straussians have mobilised and relied upon manifestly problematic material, I would also suggest that the telling of lies is not what it at stake here, and that this analysis rests on a limited conceptualisation of what the Noble Lie entails. As discussed above, the Noble Lie is not so much about deception or untruth as it is about generating meaning, creating a version of truth taken by the masses in society to be essential, eternal, or fundamental, mobilised in order to counter the abyss which precludes precisely such stable foundations.\textsuperscript{171} It is this that resides at the heart of the Straussian project; both Strauss’ political philosophy and the interventions of these Straussians prescribe and enact the generation of meaning, the production of opinion masquerading as truth.

Such a production relates closely to the instalment of moral clarity. As Wolfowitz has put it, “principles count. This is a practical was well as moral point, because principle is a powerful force in politics and particularly in democratic politics.”\textsuperscript{172} For the Straussians, then, it is the salutary effects of developing moral nodes in society that is significant here. As Wolfowitz argues, in the “practical necessities of power relationships,” the US should insist that it and its allies “shared a moral vision of human life...”.\textsuperscript{173} Similarly, as Kristol and Kagan confirm, morality must reside at the heart of US foreign policy; those who refuse to support, for instance, Israel’s position in the Middle East are “advocating an abdication by the United States of both moral judgement and political leadership.” They continue: “the United States

\textsuperscript{169} Drury, \textit{Leo Strauss and the American Right}, pp. 78-80.
\textsuperscript{170} George, “Leo Strauss, Neoconservatism and US Foreign Policy,” p. 181.
\textsuperscript{171} In this sense, the Noble Lie may be said to resemble the Foucauldian notion of the ‘Regime of Truth’, understood as the system and networks within which what appears to be ‘true’ is developed. See Stuart Hall, “Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse,” in Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor and Simeon J. Yates (eds.), \textit{Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader} (London; Thousand Oaks; New Delhi: Sage, 2003), pp. 79-80.
must not be “morally and politically neutral.” The invocation of the distinction between ‘tyrannous’ and non-tyrannous regimes explored above is central to the process of opinion formation that comprises the core of the Straussian project; it is one of the means by which such the relativism of the abyssal condition might be avoided. This is not to deny that material or other incentives form part of the Straussian project, but rather to claim that they inherited this legacy from Strauss.

Strauss’ political philosophy can be read, I would submit, as making possible, indeed calling for, such a generation of meaning due to the exposure of the abyss in the course of the project of modernity. Such an imperative is discernable, for instance, in Strauss’ problematisation and rejection of positivism’s attempt to evacuate value and its assumptions regarding objectivity, and is reflected in the Straussian challenge to and rejection of the Kentian methods of intelligence collection and analysis; this intervention produced a version of reality, posited certain connections, and rendered the situation intelligible in specific ways, in short it generated meaning. Similarly, Strauss’ claim that justice in society is an exercise of the will of the strongest, and that the semblance of justice and moral clarity is vital for society, is perceivable in the Straussian rehabilitation of productive terms such as the tyrannous regime; Strauss’ insistence that meaning must be generated in society due to the impossibility of stable, foundational, or essential standards by which justice or the good may be established led him to posit that salutary social opinions should masquerade as these, being believed to be such by most in society. That the Straussians refer to themselves as ‘opinion leaders’ corresponds closely to this. Furthermore, Strauss’ understanding of the productive power of language and ideas to generate meaning in society is also perceivable in the Straussian interventions; the conceptual conjoining of concepts such as ‘weapons of mass terror’ and ‘war on tyranny’, for instance, correlates to such a rationale.

It has been shown that on account of the impossibility, for Strauss and for the Straussians, of ‘objectivity’, intelligence is always already politicised and that it does not ‘discover’ the truth but rather produces it. This may be extended to the possibility that any perspective is, for the Straussians, always already partisan and politicised; what it at stake then, in the absence of the possibility of truth, is the competition among those putting forward options for various conceptualisations of reality which come to be seen as truth. In other words, as referred to above, the situation becomes a competition between the ‘decisions’ of those with ‘creative’ minds, those who, in Bloom’s words, ‘produce culture’, and have to fight for the imposition of their account of things. It is thus that the Straussian intervention can be read, not as the telling of lies, but rather of the production of truth: for lies to be told there must be the possibility of objective truth, something which the

Straussians refute from the outset. This logic would seem to be reflected in the Straussians’ commentary surrounding the issue of the power of ideas, as was noted above. Suffice it to cite one further example.

Mansfield posits that we must “keep democracy powerful and brave,” through the invocation of the notion of ‘freedom’. He continues,

I think I see an impromptu instance of that freedom in the passengers on United flight 93 who conquered their fear and resisted their murderers. That story deserves to go into every future American civics textbook, if it can be verified – or even if it cannot.\textsuperscript{175}

What this shows is that for Mansfield the power of this story resides not in its actually having happened but rather as a myth that should become part of the American identity, even if it cannot be verified. In other words, it is the salutary effect of this story which is the point for Mansfield here, not the details. This is an instance where not the telling of lies but the production of truth is suggested; the formation and maintenance of an American history and identity is implied in Mansfield’s statement, a reading in line with the aforementioned discussion of the Straussian intervention for the sake of scripting a particular version of reality surrounding the question of the invasion of Iraq. Minowitz seems to confirm this, stating as a defence of the Straussians that “there is a difference between exaggerating and lying, especially when the latter entails emphasizing the considerations that are most suitable for persuading the relevant audience.”\textsuperscript{176} The act of persuasion, the creation of a version of events, the art of Thrasymachus, thus resides at the heart of the Straussian project. Minowitz continues to suggest that such a concern makes sense in light of Wolfowitz’s admission that “the WMD argument was trumpeted because the administration thought it would sell better than would appeals to the administration’s other ‘fundamental concerns’.”\textsuperscript{177} That objectivity and ‘truth’ are highly problematic notions is certainly the case; it is with the Straussian response of the generation of meaning according to the reason of the strongest that I take issue. The following pages will critique the Straussian interventions and the logic upon which they have been shown to be based, arguing for an alternative response to the problem of objectivity, of the absence of foundations, the abyss.


\textsuperscript{176} Minowitz, \textit{Straussophobia}, p. 281.

\textsuperscript{177} Minowitz, \textit{Straussophobia}, p. 281.
Part II

Chapter Four

Challenging the Straussian Interventions

Introduction

Part II explores the ways in which the political thought of Jacques Derrida might be mobilised to challenge the Straussian interventions surrounding the invasion of Iraq and the securitising impulse I have shown to animate them. The deconstructive tradition has frequently been accused of being inactive, nihilistic, or useless as regards the business of analysing and taking positions in the ethico-political spheres. Rorty, for instance, contrasts it with the work of those “like Mill, Dewey and Rawls... whose work fulfils primarily public purposes,” claiming it is not “politically consequential.”\(^1\) He also notes that Derrida is taken to be “a frivolous and cynical despiser of common sense and traditional democratic values” by members of the “Anglophone philosophical community,” many of whom “attempt to excommunicate Derrida from the philosophical profession.”\(^2\) Indeed, several of the Straussians discussed above have themselves made various accusations and condemnations of deconstructive thought. As Bloom characterises it, for example, it represents “the last, predictable, stage in the suppression of reason... [in which] the interpreter’s creativity is more important than the text...”\(^3\) He continues: it “simply dissolves” the demands of the philosophical tradition; “it appeals to our worst instincts and shows where our temptations lie... [and] flatters popular democratic tastes.”\(^4\) Similarly, Schmitt and Shulsky condemn the “doctrine of deconstructionism which gave readers complete carte blanche when it came to interpreting texts, and which completely lacked the rigor Strauss brought to the problem of textual interpretation.”\(^4\)

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\(^1\) Rorty, “Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism,” p. 16.
\(^4\) Schmitt and Shulsky, “Leo Strauss and the World of Intelligence,” p. 409. Interestingly, both of these criticisms of the tradition claim that its popularity and use in academic circles are contracting and dwindling, Bloom stating “this fad will pass, as it has already in Paris,” and Schmitt and Shulsky claiming that it was “very popular (at least for a while”). In my limited experience the opposite appears to be the case; academics and students alike appear to be taking Derrida, and other deconstructive thinkers, very seriously indeed. That certain
In opposition to these characterisations, Chapter Four will explore some of the ways in which Derrida’s thought poses a series of challenges to the creation and dissemination of salutary opinions upon which the Straussian interventions were predicated. Given their common inheritance of the abyssal condition from Nietzsche and Heidegger, Derrida’s thought has significant purchase here. The chapter provides an exploration of Derrida’s commentary surrounding the question of terrorism in the context of 9/11, the ‘rogue’ state, the invasion of Iraq, and the conduct of intellectuals and those in the media. While by no means an exhaustive exposition of Derrida’s explicit interventions, it shows that Derrida’s thought is by no means a- or non-political, and that it may be utilised in challenging the Straussian logic.

However, such a project of challenge is subject to a complication at the outset, which presents a double bind. As the introduction demonstrated, for Derrida as for Strauss, there are no grounds upon which to base a preference for one particular set of assumptions over any other; given the disturbing of the possibility of all ontological foundations, the exposure of the abyss, claiming the superiority of any alternative set of prescriptions cannot be defensible. This might suggest that there could no longer be any grounds upon which to mount a challenge to the Straussian interventions, that justice does indeed inhere in the reason or will of the strongest, and that consequently there is simply no such thing as justice beyond this will. This might lead one to conclude, alternatively, that abstaining from challenge might be the only course of action. Concurrently, however, such an attempt to abstain does not itself constitute the absence of an intervention; silence and inaction is as much a complicity as anything else. As Elizabeth Dauphinée reminds us, “even silence is a potential form of violence. Silence is a decision. Silence for example can signal complicity...”.5 There is, then, no possibility of making the right decision, yet no possibility of taking no decision; there are always already consequences even, and especially, in an attempt to avoid the decision. All that remains is an attempt to take responsibility for the decision, a task which itself can never be completed.

It is this taking of responsibility that underpins the enacting of what I will call ‘deconstruction and/as resistance’. Chapter Five is dedicated to unsettling the totalising assumptions and premises mobilised by the Straussian logic, forms of which, it will be shown, they themselves rely upon. The intention here is to argue that the Straussian project of opinion construction as a response to the abyss precludes the possibility of aiming towards the taking of responsibility for the violence of any and all positions, while a response which, parallels might be drawn between Derridean deconstruction and Straussian esoteric reading will be discussed below, in the context of the Straussian tendency to self-exempt from the constraints of their own rationale.

following Derrida, struggles to restlessly resist such a process of construction by engaging in a ceaseless deconstruction, may open up a space within which the taking of responsibility for such violence might be gestured towards. Put differently, the violence of the imposition of assumptions and claims might be taken responsibility for through engaging in a deconstructive resistance to the construction and dissemination of opinion central to the Straussian project.

Chapter Six extends this project further. The violence of ontology is not limited to projects such as the Straussian, although their imposition of totalising narratives and claims is perhaps unique in terms of the self-consciousness with which it is done. Such violence inheres in any and all claims as soon as they become claims. Accordingly, the violence within that which one approves of or allies oneself with is no less problematic than that within projects one opposes. Chapter Six takes this implication of the abyss seriously by addressing a series of instances wherein ontological or metaphysical claims appear to be in evidence both in the contributions of certain Derridean-inspired scholars and in the thought of Derrida himself. The intention here is to keep the intervention of deconstruction and/as resistance moving, the ceaseless resistance it makes possible being key to destabilising ontology and taking responsibility for the violence of one’s position.

**Challenging the Creation of Salutary Opinions**

Strauss, and those following his logic, advocate the construction and dissemination of salutary opinions as the condition of possibility of politics and society. In contrast to this logic of ‘construction’, a Derridean rationale seeks to expose the violence immanent to such impositions. Derrida identifies such opinions as ‘legitimating fictions’; he notes that for Montaigne, this “supplement of a legitimating fiction,” is necessary to “establish the truth of justice... as if the absence of natural law called for the supplement of historical or positive, that is to say, fictional, law.”⁶ He comments on Montaigne’s analogy for this: “women who use ivory teeth when they’re missing their real ones, and who, instead of showing their true complexion, forge one with some foreign material.”⁷ Elsewhere, he argues that “in the order of becoming, when one cannot lay claim to a firm and stable logos, when one must make do

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with the probable, then myth is the done thing...”\textsuperscript{8} Such myth construction amounts, Anthony Burke posits, to the “power to make new social and political facts, and a consequent freedom of responsibility for them.”\textsuperscript{9} Larry George applies this failure to take responsibility to the Straussian case, claiming that “Strauss avoided taking political responsibility for his own legitimate scepticism about the possibility of ever discovering the sort of unmovable ground on which he claimed to believe society depended.”\textsuperscript{10} It is such the possibility of attempting to take of such responsibility that Derrida’s response opens up.

In contrast to the Straussian position, which explicitly advocates a process of opinion construction, Derrida insists upon the destabilisation of such processes, emphasising instead the importance of challenging such opinion. In his words, we should be mindful that

[w]hat is legitimated by the prevailing system (a combination of public opinion, the media, the rhetoric of politicians and the presumed authority of all those who, through various mechanisms, speak or are allowed to speak in the public space) are the norms inscribed in every apparently meaningful phrase that can be constructed with the lexicon of violence, aggression, crime, war, and terrorism, with the supposed differences between war and terrorism, national and international terrorism, state and nonstate terrorism, with the respect for sovereignty, national territory, and so on.\textsuperscript{11}

This statement seems directly applicable to the Straussian interventions, particularly in relation to the norms or opinions he refers to being circulated and legitimated in view of, and thereby reproducing, an apparently common-sense series of concepts and categories; in short, the opinions in circulation which make sense of the question of terrorism and the broader war against it are legitimated and reinforced by those speaking in public spheres.

This sentiment is echoed by David Campbell, who insists that such discourses and justifications should be seen not as natural but rather as “violently deployed in the present for contemporary political goals.”\textsuperscript{12} As Dan Bulley suggests, it must be emphasised that “these moral norms that we constitute cannot be anything other than context-bound affirmations of the moment. Ultimately, they have no transcendental foundation.”\textsuperscript{13} Derrida

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\textsuperscript{10} George, “Leo Strauss’s Squid Ink,” p. 261.


\textsuperscript{12} David Campbell, \textit{National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity, and Justice in Bosnia} (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 86. These goals may be the realisation of particular policy aims, such as the invasion of Iraq, or the broader project of opinion formation to protect society from a descent into relativism. That the latter is central to the argument here does not preclude the significance of the former.

proposes that we must proceed by “interrogating, in some sense deconstructing, the limits of these onto-theological concepts...”. What this suggests is that for Derrida any set of opinions will ultimately be violent and hence indefensible, yet this does not entail, as it does for the Straussians, the need to rely upon legitimating fictions. Rather, this implies the need for a constant unsettling of any such opinions, a resistance to the instalment of any such concepts as substitutes for absolute or universal values. In Michael Nass’ words, Derrida suggests a way of thinking that does not force us into believing that moral clarity always requires saying simply yes or no, a way of thinking that allows one the freedom of critique and honest interpretation to say ‘yes, but,’ ‘no, and yet,’ a way of thinking that keeps us from acceding to the belief, during politically decisive times, that nuance, measure, and honest self-critique are signs of a lack of moral purpose or resolve.

The aporetic condition necessitates this type of engagement; precisely this is in evidence in Derrida’s interventions relating to terrorism and 9/11, ‘rogues’, Iraq, and the media.

‘Terrorism’ and the Event ‘9/11’

Campbell posits that “there is a larger than normal aporia at the heart of September 11 which makes simplistic narrativization unequal to the task of understanding.” In light of this aporetic situation, Derrida proposes a response to 9/11 which resists the use of the restricted and restricting conceptualisations and the drive to encourage the formation of a consensus view so evident in the Straussian logic; as Dillon notes, “rhetorics of moral indignation and ritual purification provide an easy way out...”. While the Straussians mobilised the notion of 9/11 as a means by which to encourage the notion that Iraq should be invaded, in other words, set it to work as a justificatory premise by inscribing it with particular rhetorical and discursive meaning, Derrida insists that it is important to inquire in to the status of this as an event. In this spirit, he affirmed that rather than presume we understand the thing referred to, “[w]e must try to know more, to take our time and to hold onto our freedom so as to begin

to think this first effect of the so-called event.” Derrida insists that the idea of the ‘event’ must be questioned, not in the sense of arguing that it ‘did not happen’ but rather to attend to the specific ways in which the event ‘9/11’ has been understood, remembered, or produced. Accordingly, he poses the question: “What is an impression in this case? And an event?” By this, he seems to suggest that we should take account of the ways in which the event ‘9/11’ has become intelligible, the impression we have received of it, and how we, in turn, contribute to its reproduction. This is because, as he puts it,

to produce a ‘major event’, it is, sad to say, not enough, and this has been true for some time now, to cause the deaths of some four thousand people, and especially ‘civilians,’ in just a few seconds by means of so-called advanced technology. Many examples could be given from the world wars... but also from after these wars, examples of quasi-instantaneous mass murders that were not recorded, interpreted, felt, and presented as ‘major events’. They did not give the ‘impression,’ at least not to everyone, of being unforgettable catastrophes. Derrida explores the relationship between the event ‘itself’ and the impression by means of which it is understood, positing that the impression received of ‘9/11’ “is in itself an event... [and] cannot be dissociated from all the affects, interpretations, and rhetoric that have at once reflected, communicated, and ‘globalized’ it, from everything that also and first of all formed, produced, and made it possible.” It is, then, the ‘event’ qua impression that Derrida emphasises as being anything but self-evident yet at the same time the thing referred to when ‘9/11’ is spoken of; it is something produced as a consequence of discursive phenomena and it is, therefore, “our duty to recall that the shock waves produced by such murders are never purely natural and spontaneous. They depend on a complex machinery involving history, politics, the media, and so on.” As he reiterates,

[for Europe, for the United States, for their media and their public opinion, quantitatively comparable killings, or even those greater in number, whether immediate or indirect, never produce such an intense upheaval when they occur outside European of American space (Cambodia, Rwanda, Palestine, Iraq, and so on). What this seems to signify for Derrida is that it is not simply the quantitative scale of the attack which has propelled the development of its impression as a major event; this means that we “must thus look for other explanations – meaningful and qualitative explanations.”

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19 Derrida, “Autoimmunity,” p. 88
Such explanations relate, Derrida emphasises, to the question of power, and the ways in which those who wield power as regards the formation of popular narratives might impact upon the formation of ‘common-sense’ or apparently self-evident understandings of 9/11 as a major event. He points, accordingly, to the danger of repeatedly referring to an event such as 9/11; he posits that we must ask “what is pushing us to repeat endlessly and without knowing what we are talking about, precisely there where language and the concept come up against their limits. ‘September 11, September 11, le 11 septembre, 9/11’.” He continues, we must ask:

From where does this menacing injunction itself come to us? How is it being forced upon us? Who or what gives us this threatening order...: name, repeat, rename ‘September 11’, ‘le 11 septembre’, even when you do not yet know what you are saying and are not yet thinking what you refer to in this way.25

What Derrida points to here seems to be the idea that this immediate and constant reference to 9/11 occurred even before the ‘impression’, in the sense of what it was understood to be and signify, had been constructed. In other words, the ways in which it was constituted was related to the command to repeat, to understanding it as a major event, the response to which, by implication, had to be comparably major. He continues that we must pause, interrupt this tendency, in order to consider what this “repetition compulsion signifies, translates, or betrays.”26 Derrida thus exposes a fundamental dimension of the Straussian intervention: the productive dimension of constant repetition in the sense of its forming the impression of the thing referred to. In other words, the idea of the major event ‘9/11’ and the appropriate response to it grew at least in part of out the compulsion to repeat and to name; this compulsion to repeat and name grew not out of thin air but rather from an imperative by those wielding power, the formers of public opinion, an example of which, as Kristol’s characterisation of his PNAC co-members as ‘opinion leaders’ discussed above suggests, the Straussians took themselves to be. This would seem to support the notion that the Straussian interventions can be read as an instance of ‘construction’, in contrast to a Derridean deconstruction; a specific constructed conceptualisation of the event ‘9/11’ was mobilised in by the Straussians as part of the process of opinion construction.

As part of the process of opinion formation relating to the invasion of Iraq, the Straussians also referred frequently to a certain conception of the nature and scale threat posed by terrorism. In contrast, Derrida broaches the subject differently, pausing to question such assumptions, for example asking: “In the first place, what is terror? What distinguishes it from fear, anxiety and panic?”27 In posing this question, Derrida invites a reflection on the ways in which ‘terror’ is understood, how it is applied and with what effects to specific

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groups or individuals. In his analysis of this question, Derrida also emphasises that we need to try to explain how and why a particular individual or group comes to acquire the label ‘terrorist’. In *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, Derrida discusses the implications of naming in this way by drawing attention to the decision of the French government in the 1990s to re-narrate what had been called the ‘events’ in Algeria as ‘war’. In his words, “[a]rmed repression, an internal police operation, and state terrorism thus all of a sudden became a ‘war’.” As regards this changing of name, he asks:

What did this law reveal? That it was necessary, and that we were able, to change all the names previously used to qualify what had earlier been so modestly called, in Algeria, precisely the ‘events’ (the inability, once again, of popular opinion to name the ‘thing’ adequately).  

What this changing of the name resulted in was, then, a reconfiguration of how history was understood, a retrospective re-narration of the past from the present. In other words, Derrida seems to suggest that such a renaming produces anew the concepts referred to. Such a naming can thus demonise its object in the present and retrospectively delegitimate it, condemning it in the present and changing its past. A similar re-naming occurred, he argues, in respect to those resisting the French in Algeria: “On the other side, the terrorists were considered and from now on are considered in much of the world as freedom fighters and heroes of national independence.” This is, he explains, by no means a circumstance unique to the Algerian case:

As for the terrorism of armed groups that helped force the foundation and recognition of the state of Israel, was that national or international? And what about the different groups of Palestinian terrorists today? And the Irish? And the Afghans who fought against the Soviet Union? And the Chechynes? At what point does one terrorism stop being denounced as such to be hailed as the only recourse left in a legitimate fight? And what about the inverse? Where does one draw the line between the national and the international, the police and the army, a ‘peacekeeping’ intervention and war, terrorism and war, civilian and military, in a territory and within the structures that assure the defensive or offensive capacity of a society?

What this shows is that for Derrida the act of naming does not simply passively describe what is, but rather constitutes the impression of what is, and it is in this light that we should hesitate in the use of categories such as the ‘terrorist’, and think through the productive effects of such naming within the narratives surrounding 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq.

Furthermore, this challenge to the category ‘terrorism’ entails a further reflection on the question of how it differs from other forms of fear or violence. He asks:

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28 Derrida, “Autoimmunity,” p. 104  
29 Derrida, “Autoimmunity,” p. 104  
How does a terror that is organized, provoked, and instrumentalized differ from that fear that an entire tradition, from Hobbes to Schmitt and even to Benjamin, holds to be the very condition of the authority of law and of the sovereign exercise of power, the very condition of the political and of the state? Here, Derrida alludes to the insistence of these theorists, indeed of the Western philosophic tradition, a logic which inheres in the Straussian account, that it is the fear instilled by the threat of force that is the condition of possibility of state sovereignty and hence of politics understood in this way. He emphasises the problem of distinguishing between state-inspired fear as legitimate and non-state terrorism as illegitimate, particularly because “the political history of the word ‘terrorism’ is derived in large part from a reference to the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution, a terror that was carried out in the name of the state and that in fact presupposed a legal monopoly on violence.”

He thus draws attention to a central problem immanent to any attempt to distinguish legitimate state violence from illegitimate non-state or ‘terrorist’ violence: the former is only ever retrospectively deemed legitimate by the laws and narratives it itself instils after its inevitably violent self-creation. Here we have one manifestation of the aporia of state sovereignty, the ‘mystical foundation of authority’ as Derrida elsewhere puts it. In his words,

Nietzsche explained that the master is the one who coins the language, who imposes the language, so there is no culture in which at some point there was not a violent imposition of language. Then, after a certain time, things can be pacified, we just forget the initial violence, but at the beginning of every society, every nation, every nation state, there is a violence... it would be too easy to demonstrate this.

What Derrida points towards here is, I would submitt, precisely what the Straussian account enacts: the use of the name ‘terrorist’ reflects that “the dominant power is the one that manages to impose and, thus, to legitimate... the terminology and thus the interpretation that best suits it in a given situation.” The use of the term ‘terrorist’ functions in the Straussian interventions, then, to delegitimate both in the present and the past the bearers of the term and simultaneously to bolster the supposed distinction between legitimate state violence and illegitimate non-state violence, a distinction which attempt to erase the founding violence which inheres to the concepts of statehood, sovereignty and legitimacy.

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33 Derrida, “Force of Law”. This will be explored further below, along with the question of Strauss’ utilisation of Schmittean ideas.
‘Rogues’ and ‘Tyrants’

Derrida also questions the function of particular productive signifiers, centrally the ‘rogue’ state. His commentary on the functions of this term can, by extension, be seen to be highly significant in relation to the Straussian concept of the ‘regime’, in particular the ‘tyrannical’ variety. Derrida emphasises the significance of the circulation of the concept of the ‘rogue’, asking, “who are they? Who are the others of brothers, the nonbrothers? What makes them separate beings, excluded or wayward, outcast or displaced...?” In Rogues he claims that the word, like all words, has a history in the English language which must be attended to; amongst those who have borne the label are “beggars and vagabonds of various kinds but also... all sorts of riffraff, villains, and unprincipled outlaws (‘a dishonest, unprincipled person,’ says the Oxford English Dictionary, ‘a rascal’).” He continues that the meaning can be extended to

all nonhuman living beings, that is, to plants and animals whose behaviour appears deviant or perverse. Any wild animal can be called a rogue but especially those, such as rogue elephants, that behave like ravaging outlaws, violating the customs and conventions, the customary practices, of their own community.

If such behaviour is noted in a particular animal, he explains, a “distinguishing sign is thus affixed to it, a badge or hood, to mark its status as a rogue.” This is significant because “the qualification rogue calls for a marking or branding classification that sets something apart.” The term ‘rogue’, then, functions to designate an abnormal, unpredictable living entity, one which is not necessarily human: “in the animal kingdom, a rogue is defined as a creature that is born different. It is incapable of mingling with the herd, it keeps to itself, and it can attack at any time, without warning.” This functions, then, to delimit the realm of the normal, predictable, customary, from the abnormal, unpredictable, alien.

By extension, the use of the term in foreign policy narratives raises the issue of legitimacy. Derrida comments that it points to “the lines of division between so-called legitimate states and bastard or ‘rogue’ states.” Legitimacy is denied the rogue because they introduce disorder into the street; they are picked out, denounced, judged, condemned, pointed out as actual or virtual delinquents, as those accused and pursued by the civilized citizen, by the state or civil society, by decent, law-abiding citizens, by their police, sometimes by international law and its armed police who watch over the law and over moral, over politics and over politesse, over all the paths

37 Derrida, Rogues, p. 93.
38 Derrida, Rogues, pp. 93-94.
39 Derrida, Rogues, p. 94.
40 Derrida, Rogues, p. 61.
[voies] of circulation – all pedestrian zones, highways, sea and air routes, information highways, e-mail, the Web, and so on.\textsuperscript{41}

Here, Derrida seems to emphasise the ways in which the rogue as illegitimate becomes a legitimate target against which the legitimate state may mobilise all its legitimate repressive force; once the mark has been affixed, the rogue is sufficiently immediately illegitimate to render its destruction legitimate without question. That it is “doing what is not supposed to be done, that is, according to established norms, laws, and the police,”\textsuperscript{42} suffices for such targeting to be rendered legitimate. The use of the term can be said, therefore, to designate difference understood in terms of danger, the unpredictable threat. This conjuring of a sense of illegitimacy and danger can be understood, Derrida suggests, if the impact of this naming is taken into consideration. The terms is

an interpretation, an assignation, and, in truth, always a denunciation, a complaint or accusation, a charge, an evaluation, a verdict. As such it announces, prepares, and begins to justify some sanction. The Etat voyou must be punished, contained, reduced to a harmless state, if need be by the force of law [droit] and the right [driot] of force.\textsuperscript{43}

In this sense the bearer of the term is rendered a target which must be made safe. This necessitates a concurrent bearer of legitimate force by means of which such disarmament may be occasioned, i.e. “supposedly legitimate states, those that respect an international law that they have the power to control...”\textsuperscript{44} It is thus that, Derrida makes clear, with regard to the laws of the international system,

the so-called legitimate and law-abiding states interpret them in accordance with their interests. These are the states that have at their disposal the greatest force and are prepared to call these Etats voyous to order and bring them back to reason, if need be by armed intervention – whether punitive or preemptive.\textsuperscript{45}

The rendering of the rogue has the consequence, then, for Derrida that intervention by so-called legitimate states appears necessary and justified. The term functions to discredit its target and, as he notes, “a rogue state is whomever the United States says it is.”\textsuperscript{46}

Thus Derrida offers an alternative way of engaging with the question of the construction and dissemination of productive terminologies, exposing and challenging their functions and effects, in contrast to the Straussians’ mobilisation of them. That for the Straussians any particular set of opinions cannot be deemed any more justifiable than any other does not preclude this delineation of legitimate and illegitimate; on the contrary, it

\textsuperscript{41} Derrida, Rogues, pp. 63-64.
\textsuperscript{42} Derrida, Rogues, p. 65. ‘Etat voyou’ translates as ‘rogue state’.
\textsuperscript{43} Derrida, Rogues, p. 79.
\textsuperscript{44} Derrida, Rogues, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{45} Derrida, Rogues, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{46} Derrida, Rogues, p. 104.
demands it. If the opinions upon which society rests are not inherently superior, this poses for the Straussians the danger of a descent into relativism. In order to avoid this, those influencing the flow and dissemination of ideas must ensure the appearance of moral clarity; the use of the term ‘rogue’, like the terrorist or tyrant, functions to render intelligible the legitimate from the illegitimate, the good from the evil, and so forth. In contrast to this, for Derrida these binaries must not be reinforced but rather their instability and constructed nature made apparent. This is particularly significant as regards the use by the Straussians of particular names and terms to pre-identify and delegitimate their chosen targets, whether by means of the notion of the terrorist or rogue, or more uniquely in their rehabilitation at Strauss’ insistence of reference to fundamentally different types of ‘regime’ and the reintroduction of the concept of ‘tyranny’. The use of these terms, which aim at securing a sense of moral clarity and precise distinction between ‘good’ or ‘bad’ individuals or groups, is precisely what Derrida criticises here; their use serves the interests of whoever happens to be disseminating particular narratives. As Derrida notes, “all of this must not only be analyzed as a speculative disorder, as a conceptual chaos of zone of passing turbulence in public or political language. We must also recognize here strategies and relations of force.”

Problematising ‘Iraq’

Such relations of force were significant, Derrida shows, in relation to the question of the invasion of Iraq. As Maja Zehfuss notes in her analysis of a debate between German and US intellectuals surrounding their respective positions relating to the invasion,

[...]

the exchange of letters speaks of the need to decide and the dilemmas any alternative involves. There does not seem to be a rationally satisfactory option. Thus the problem facing us perhaps cannot be solved by reference to what we know... We are confronted with an aporia and, as a result, with the question of a responsible decision.

We are, at the outset, then, presented with the impossibility of knowing what the definitively ‘right’ course of action is or was vis-a-vis Iraq; we face an aporetic problem. This, however, does not preclude the taking of a position. Derrida states that, while “it goes without saying that like many of us here, I have no sympathy for the regime that has just collapsed in Iraq...

I was very strongly opposed to the way in which the United States led this affair.... His position is in evidence in his commentary surrounding the ‘Brussels Tribunal’ set up to investigate the invasion of Iraq. In an interview he states that while I have a critical attitude towards the Bush administration and its project, its attack on Iraq... I would not wish for the United States in general to have to appear before such a tribunal. I would want to distinguish a number of forces within the United States that have opposed the policy on Iraq as firmly as in Europe. This policy does not involve the American people in general, nor even the American States, but a phase in American politics which, for that matter, is about to be questioned again in the run-up to the presidential elections.

Here, Derrida makes the point that the US cannot be regarded as a homogeneous monolith but rather that the responsibility for the invasion of Iraq rests with specific groups and individuals associated with the reigning administration, and it is these who should be held accountable. It is thus that Derrida lent his support to the Tribunal, held on April 14-17th, 2004, which was entitled “Questioning the New Imperial World Order: A Hearing on the ‘Project for the New American Century’.” Although he was unable to attend in person as a consequence of his illness, Derrida provided an interview which comprised a section of the final report compiled by the participants. This tribunal was specifically designed, as Derrida’s interviewer, De Cauter, explains, to direct its attention “not to the government in general but more particularly to the Project for the New American Century, the think tank which has issued all these extreme ideas of unilateralism, hegemony, militarism of the world etc...” Derrida appears to concur with this indictment of PNAC and justifies the tribunal’s focus on it as the object of investigation:

Where there is an explicit political project which declares its hegemonic intent and proposes to put everything in place to accomplish this, there one can, in effect, level accusation, protest in the name of international law and existing institutions, in their spirit and in their letter.

The Tribunal was designed to investigate the activities of PNAC during the period leading up to the invasion of Iraq, and while it had no legal authority, as a peoples’ court run by intellectuals, writers, artists and so forth, it had, Derrida claimed, “a symbolic weight in which I believe, an exemplary symbolic weight.” This clearly demonstrates that he took a position on this matter, challenging the interventions of PNAC, which was founded by, directed by and boasted the membership of many of the Strausians discussed here, and, as was explored in Chapter Three, the activities of which included the publication of material

52 Derrida, “For a Justice to Come,” p. 2.
conflating the questions of Iraq, WMD and terrorism, lobbing for the instalment of Chalabi as ruler of Iraq, and the advocation of the curtaining of civil liberties in the name of security and defence within the US. Derrida applauded the efforts of the Brussels Tribunal:

I wanted to salute your initiative in its principle... [it] is symbolically an important and necessary thing to do today... even if only in that it feeds the geopolitical reflection... in order to raise or to sharpen the vigilance of the citizens of the world...54

Here, then, Derrida takes the position of opposition to the specific actions of PNAC but importantly, does this without conceptually conjoining PNAC with the broader government or the US population. He thus intervenes differently, refusing the logic of conjoining for the sake of realising his political ends, thereby forming a marked contrast with the Straussian interventions.

This position is reinforced in the context of his commentary relating to the role and activities of intellectuals and the media. In his praise of certain altermondialist movements in the media he notes the importance of resisting “what is happening today, and could not but be happening, in Iraq, according to the disastrous plans laid out by Mr. Wolfowitz, Mr. Cheney, and Mr. Rumsfeld, well before September 11.”55 Similarly, in an interview in 2004, Derrida again stated that

there is evidently — and I suppose you will discuss this in your commission of inquiry—the enormous problem of the media, of control of the media, of the media power which has accompanied this entire history in a decisive manner, from September 11 to the invasion of Iraq, an invasion which, by the way, in my opinion was already scheduled well before September 11.56

This indicates that Derrida believed that the policy of regime change in Iraq was decided upon long before the 9/11 attacks occurred, and that the media are significant in this.

Thus, despite its aporetic character, Derrida took a position and intervened in the context of the question of the invasion of Iraq. This challenges the characterisation of a deconstructive position as non- or apolitical. That Derrida’s interventions in themselves cannot be deemed inherently superior to those enacted by the Straussians remains the case as a consequence of the aporetic condition faced; this will be explored further below following a brief comment upon Derrida’s thought regarding the practice of those in the media.

56 Derrida, “For a Justice to Come,” p. 5.
**The Temptation of the Media**

In ways that speak directly to the processes of opinion creation and dissemination central to the Straussian project, Derrida poses the question of what an ethical stance vis-a-vis the media might look like, and asserts that

> [i]t is, first of all, to develop a critical culture of the spectrality of the media. For instance, we must suspect what the media wants us to rely on; we know how they can interpret, filter, sophisticate, the so-called live reports... so we have to know and to teach the way the media fabricate artificially their objects, their information, and so on and so forth.\(^{57}\)

This indicates that for Derrida, it is vital that the ways in which the media produce the impression of events, the role of the media in constituting an event, be attended to, and importantly ‘taught’. For Derrida, this critical culture ought to be wide-spread, part of a society which operates in terms of debate and questioning, directly challenging the Straussian logic of constraining the flow of ideas in society. He explains:

> [t]his teaching is not only our responsibility outside of the media, it is also the responsibility of people in the media to cultivate this critique, to teach technically what happens in the media, and also to resist the concentration of the international corporations which more and more control this power.\(^{58}\)

This raises two further points: firstly that for Derrida, not only should those outside the media encourage critical engagement with media output, but so too should those within it and, secondly, that both those within and outside the media should oppose the centralisation and control of the media in corporate hands, in order that variety and independence may be maintained. This stands in marked contrast to the Straussian position on both counts. This is demonstrated by an examination of their publications in Kristol’s *Weekly Standard*; it is owned and funded by Rupert Murdoch’s extensive corporate media network, and their frequent appearances on audio-visual news programs have invariably been within this empire. In contrast to this, as Nass relays, Derrida lent his support to the French publication *Le Monde Diplomatique*, which in 1996 attained financial and editorial independence by establishing its own company; in celebration of its fiftieth anniversary in 2004 he wrote an essay in which he claimed that “*Le Monde Diplomatique* will have epitomized for me the honor and courage of what was, through the rigor and integrity of reporting, often unavailable elsewhere...”\(^{59}\)

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\(^{58}\) Derrida, “Specters of Media,” p. 45.

For Derrida the danger of such centralisation seems to relate to the homogenisation of public debate. He comments that we should be mindful that "a magazine can censor more or less whatever it wants when it wants, it can refuse to publish responses, oversee their length and framing, control their date of publication, and so forth.”

He continues:

There is a terrible unilateralness in the occupation of public space by a form of speech that is, finally, private; this violent appropriation will always limit the concrete efficiency, the real functioning of that fundamental right that in principle links democracy to the freedom of the press. The limit will never disappear, to be sure, but just because the task is infinite should not discourage us – quite the contrary – from working to see that this right is respected to an ever greater degree.

As Nass comments, "Derrida thus bears witness to the values of a free press... [and encourages] resistance and critique everywhere this freedom of the press is smugly touted or simply taken for granted.”

To this end, Derrida proposed that

far from wishing to withdraw scholarly work from the public space of the written or audio-visual press, we ... must, on the contrary, open and increase the number of passages between them. With the help of informed, cultivated, vigilant journalists of integrity.

Derrida extends this point, warning of 'a temptation of the media'. This temptation, he explains, "actually encourages academics to use the power of the media as an easy and immediate way of obtaining a certain power of seduction, sometimes indeed just power alone.”

This utilisation of the media manifests itself in an attempt to “exert pressure through the press and through public opinion, in order to acquire an influence or a semblance of authority...” I would submit that this description applies to the activities of many of the Straussians, albeit to different degrees, and would agree with Derrida that engaging in such activities "constitutes a breach of confidence, an abuse of authority – in a word, an abuse of power.”

To resist the possibility of such an abuse, Derrida advises that journalists themselves should be answerable, and subject to scrutiny. Such analysis could comprise he suggests, asking

what is the real competence, how were they recruited and treated by the management of the newspaper, what are they able to and what are they unable to understand, what do they know, no longer know, or not yet know how to read, what do they defend and why, to what threats are they a reaction, both they and their newspapers, from what

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62 Nass, *Derrida From Now On*, p. 87
64 Derrida, *Points*, p. 401.
and from whom are they protecting themselves, what systems of alliance do they form to this end, whether consciously or not, etc.\textsuperscript{67}

Similarly, as Derrida notes, journalists, when facing constraints of space or form should not rely on such rhetorical devices but ought rather “to mark humbly and clearly that things are more complicated – and that the reader ought to be aware of that.”\textsuperscript{68} This stands in marked contrast to the Straussian strategy of deliberately over-simplifying and presenting as morally clear and sewn up that which was anything but. In this way, as Strauss directed, philosophical criticism and questioning was kept away from society, the population being encouraged to prefer the established to the non-established.

Indeed, as Derrida notes, it is not complex texts which have the “effect of obscurantism or irrationalism... [I]t is often the case that the contrary is true: obscurantism can invade a language of communication that is seemingly direct, simple, straightforward.”\textsuperscript{69} It is also in this tone that he reminds us that “the conclusion – at least the conclusion that, in the immediate, reaches the greatest number of readers – remains therefore the one that the newspaper will have decided, for its own reasons, to stage. In a space of great visibility that remains its private property.”\textsuperscript{70} Whilst this was not written specifically about the \textit{Weekly Standard}, this evaluation applies to it. In short, Derrida’s position seems to be concerned with resisting the current situation applicable to the Straussian intervention wherein

the expressly political discourse of the ‘political class’, media discourse, and intellectuals, scholarly or academic discourse... are more than ever welded together... [T]hey communicate and cooperate at every moment toward producing the greatest force with which to assure the hegemony or the imperialism in question.\textsuperscript{71}

This speaks directly to Strauss’ insistence that a docile populace should be encouraged:

Modern democracy would be mass rule were it not for the fact that the mass cannot rule, but is ruled by elites... one of the most important virtues required for the smooth working of democracy, as far as the mass is concerned, is said to be electoral apathy, viz., lack of public spirit; not indeed the salt of the earth but the salt of modern democracy are those citizens who read nothing but the sports pages and the comic section.\textsuperscript{72}

Derrida, in contrast to Strauss, challenges such apathy, insisting that citizens are called upon to work, to read the text being discussed and not just the article that is devoted to it or substituted for it, to verify the information that is proposed to them and not to take at its word what they are being told about a text of fact. One

\textsuperscript{67} Derrida, \textit{Points}, p. 448.
\textsuperscript{68} Derrida, \textit{Points}, p. 429.
\textsuperscript{69} Derrida, \textit{Points}, p. 429.
\textsuperscript{70} Derrida, \textit{Points}, p. 446.
\textsuperscript{71} Derrida, \textit{Spectres of Marx}, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{72} Strauss, \textit{Liberalism Ancient and Modern}, p. 5.
must teach the reader as well as the student that the difficulty of a discourse is not a sin...73

The above instances of Derrida’s interventions and commitments are not intended as an exhaustive list of his activities during the period leading up to the invasion of Iraq. Rather, they demonstrate both that he committed to a series of positions and causes, and that these allegiances were predicated upon a spirit of challenging and exposing power relations at work in the dominant narratives. This has been included in order to show that Derrida had a politics, that he could not have been without one, and that he intervened in light of his commitments.

However, these alternative interventions are not what will be relied upon to challenge the Straussian project here. That Derrida enacted a series of alternative responses and interventions during the period leading up to the invasion of Iraq cannot suffice. This is not because these interventions were not significant, indeed, in my estimation, many were praiseworthy. The reason is that due to the destabilisation of the ontological foundations upon which to ground a preference for one set of opinions or commitments over another, Derrida’s account cannot in itself be said to be superior to or more choice worthy than those of the Straussians. In other words, Derrida’s orientation cannot in itself be claimed to be any more defensible than any alternative account, including the Straussians’, due to the absence of any basis or point of preference upon which to ground such a claim, as a consequence of the foundationless of value/knowledge claims.

This may appear to entail an impasse, that the holding of opinion is of necessity arbitrary, and accordingly that the reason of the strongest should prevail, i.e. that dominant narratives should masquerade as essential or universal; in short, that the Straussian logic is the only possible outcome. However, a challenge can be posed to this, which begins with the question of the holding of opinions itself. That no particular set of opinions can in themselves be deemed superior or universal does not command or permit the an abdication of responsibility from the holding of political opinions; on the contrary, what this shows is that the holding of opinion is so important that beginning and ending the analysis of this phenomenon cannot be sufficient. That none can be shown to be inherently superior means we have to dig deeper and explore how one might responsibly commit to an always already indefensible politics. The holding of political opinion and the enacting of intervention is always already occurring and always already indefensible. One is always already intervening, as much by attempting to avoid as by ‘being active’, and these interventions cannot in themselves be defensible. Negotiating and taking responsibility for what one is already doing is thus vital. This emphatically does not mean anything goes and justice inheres in whatever

73 Derrida, Points, p. 429.
is dominant; it means, rather, that it is important to take responsibility for the violence inherent to the (inexorable) taking of a position. As Caputo notes, “Derrida insists upon a vigilance which will keep the trembling in motion and remain alert to the self-induced illusions of presence.” 74 He continues: “‘thinking’ remains continually exposed to Derrida’s deconstructive critique... it must resist being enamored of its own discourse.” 75 Taking account of abyss or aporia that resides at heart of any political opinion or persuasion is, then, crucial.

The Productive Effects of the Abyss

The impossibility of an inherently superior set of political opinions is due to the unsettling of ontology immanent to the abyssal or aporetic encounter; it undermines the possibility of foundations upon which to base a preference for any particular opinions or beliefs. As Beardsworth notes, “an aporia is something which is impracticable. A route which is impracticable is one that cannot be traversed, it is an uncrossable path.” 76 An experience of aporia comprises an element of one’s way being blocked, and it is within this impasse, Derrida explains, that

the problematic task becomes impossible and where we are exposed, absolutely without protection, without problem, and without prosthesis, without possible substitution, singularly exposed in our absolute and absolutely naked uniqueness, that is to say disarmed... There in sum, in this place of aporia, there is no longer any problem. Not that, alas or fortunately, the solutions have been given, but because one could no longer even find a problem that would constitute itself... behind which to protect oneself. 77

Aporia is, then, a space wherein one is exposed to the impossibility not only of solving problems but indeed of even relying upon the categories by which an intelligible problem might be decipherable, in short this abyssal condition one in which one is exposed and disarmed by the impossibility of providing a correct account, of even maintaining categories or concepts. This aporetic space resides at the heart of all philosophical and ethical endeavour.

76 Beardsworth, Derrida & the Political, p. 32.
77 Derrida, Aporias, p. 12.
As has been explored, Strauss’ response to this problem of the abyss or aporia was to insist that excessive philosophical questioning which undermined the opinions should be restricted to only a select few in society. Interestingly, Derrida briefly takes up this theme, dealing explicitly with the notion of esotericism so distinctively used by Strauss and his followers. He states in response to the question of how to navigate the abyss:

[T]he possibility of speaking or walking seems just as impossible. So difficult in any case that this passage through aporia seems first of all (perhaps) reserved for a secret few. This esotericism seems strange for democracy... Its to-come would be jealously thought, watched over, hardly taught by a few. Very suspect.78

This seems to speak directly to the Straussian position; Derrida appears to have anticipated the possibility or temptation that the aporetic condition be obscured, guarded jealously by a few. He rejects this position; for Derrida such exclusivity and esotericism amount to a self-deconstructive tendency because inherent to any attempt to obscure, avoid or surmount the aporetic encounter lies its own undermining or unravelling. Importantly for what follows, Derrida describes the attempt to defend against or avoid these aporetic conditions as ‘autoimmune’. By this, mobilising biological terminologies, he suggests that

[T]he immunitary reaction protects the ‘indemnity’ of the body proper in producing antibodies against foreign antigens. As for the process of auto-immunization... it consists for a living organism... of protecting itself against its self-protection by destroying its own immune system.79

In other words, immanent to any attempt to secure against the abyss is a self-destroying tendency; in attempting to protect oneself from the aporia, one self-undermines. The notion of autoimmunity thus relates to the aporia and to any attempt to avoid or subdue it; because it is the condition of possibility for the taking of responsibility and aiming towards as always unattainable justice, any attempt to defend against it is detrimental, undermining the possibility of taking responsibility. Thus Derrida submits that the apparent immobilisation engendered by the aporetic encounter can be navigated only if one attempts “to move not against or out of the impasse but, in another way, according to another thinking of the aporia, one perhaps more enduring.”80 In Beardsworth’s estimation, “Derrida’s philosophy together with its political implications can best be articulated in the form of ‘aporetic thinking’.”81

For Derrida, the aporia represents both the impossibility of ethics, justice, responsibility, and their condition of possibility; he claims that “a sort of nonpassive

80 Derrida, Aporias, p. 13
81 Beardsworth, Derrida & the Political, p. 31.
endurance of the aporia was the condition of responsibility and decision."\textsuperscript{82} As Zehfuss reiterates, "for an ethical decision to be possible we have to experience an aporia..."\textsuperscript{83} What this entails is that the aporia should not be passed over, successfully navigated, defeated, or obscured by the dissemination of opinion masquerading as truth but rather that “such an experience must remain such if one wants to think, to make come or to let come any event of decision or responsibility.”\textsuperscript{84} As Derrida elaborates elsewhere, while the encounter may be a daunting one,

aporia is not something negative, not something which in fact paralyses us, but on the contrary it is an ordeal, a test, a crucial moment through which we have to go, even if we are stuck we have to experience this moment of aporia in order to make a decision, in order to take responsibility, in order to have a future, and so on and so forth. So for me the aporia, despite the apparent negative connotation is not simply a paralysis. The paralysis that it connotes, the aporia for me, in not paralysis, it is a chance; not so-called ‘luck’, but something which conditions affirmation, decision and responsibility.\textsuperscript{85}

Such a sentiment is echoed by many of those who utilise Derrida’s ideas. For instance, Dillon posits that

[a]porias do not disarm. They empower. They do not negate. They provoke. They do not close down our capacity to respond. They open it up. The aporia of justice is the condition of possibility of justice... The aporia of justice is thus also a beginning not an end. It does not silence. It incites.\textsuperscript{86}

The space of aporia can be read in this way, then, as a provocative, affirmative, and productive, rather than subduing or undermining, encounter. As Burke echoes, aporias bring possibility, the hope of breaking down the hegemony and assumptions of powerful political concepts, to think and create new social, ethical, and economic relationships outside their oppressive structures of political and epistemological order – in short, they help us think new paths.\textsuperscript{87}

Indeed, it seems to have had this effect not only on Derrida and others in the deconstructive tradition but also on Strauss; his response to the challenge posed by Nietzsche of this abyssal condition can be read as comprising a core concern of his political philosophy. If this is the case then Derrida would seem to be correct in asserting that the abyss or aporia compels a response rather than induces silence. As he puts it:

What would a path be without aporia? Would there be a way [voie] without what clears the way there where the way is not opened, whether it is blocked or still buried

\textsuperscript{82} Derrida, \textit{Aporias}, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{84} Derrida, \textit{Aporias}, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{85} Derrida, “Time and Memory, Messianicity, the Name of God,” in Patton and Smith (eds.), \textit{Jacques Derrida}, p. 63.
\textsuperscript{87} Burke, “Aporias of Security,” p. 5.
in the nonway? I cannot think the notion of the way without the necessity of deciding there where the decision seems impossible. Nor can I think the decision and thus the responsibility there where the decision is already possible and programmable. As John Sallis notes, although “one is shaken, made to tremble at the edge of an abyss,” this encounter is “capable of leading one back from pessimism to affirmation.”

Derrida explains:

It is not a taste for the void or for destruction that leads anyone to recognise the right of this necessity to ‘empty out’ increasingly and to deconstruct the philosophical responses that consist in totalising, in filling the space of the question or denying its possibility, in fleeing from the very thing it will have allowed one to glimpse. On the contrary, it is a matter there of an ethical and political imperative, an appeal as unconditional as the appeal of thinking from which it is not separated.

The abyss, then, resists the foreclosure of the space within which decisions can be made by refusing to subscribe to any particular logocentric view of ‘good’ and ‘evil’, ensuring that ethics is not reduced to a pre-existing program or formula, is never simply ‘given’ by virtue of this or that philosophical or political tradition or inheritance, in short by resisting foreclosure itself. This necessitates the making of the (undecidable) decision.

The Undecidable Decision

Undecidability is the condition that remains given the abyssal or aporetic condition. As Caputo comments, “undecidability is taken, or mistaken, to mean a pathetic state of apathy, the inability to act, paralysed by the play of signifiers before our eyes, like a deer caught in a headlight.” Similarly, Campbell notes that it is “often (mis)understood as licensing an anarchical irresponsibility, it is taken to be the very negation of politics, understood in terms of the decision, and a concomitant denial of responsibility.” This would seem to suggest that the undecidable is the non-decision, the absence of the ability to decide, the end of the possibility of responsibility to the degree that if we cannot decide what to do, if we are immobilised, the slip into precisely the relativism Strauss attempts to defend against occurs.

88 Derrida, On the Name, p. 83.
90 Derrida, Spectres of Marx, p. 36.
Indeed, this would seem to imply an impasse vis-a-vis political intervention. However, a different reading of this aporetic condition is possible.

Undecidability should, Ernesto Laclau claims, “be literally taken as that condition from which no course of action necessarily follows.”93 That no particular course of action necessarily follows does not, however, entail that no course of action follows, neither that any course of action amounts, as the reason of the strongest, to justice. The question must be then: “How can one judge whilst respecting the inextricable structure of aporia...?”94 In other words, if the foundations upon which any choice might be deemed preferable to any other have been undermined, how can one begin to judge between them?

According to Derrida, there is “no decision nor responsibility without the test of aporia or undecidability.”95 As Zehfuss explains, in order to begin struggling with “ethico-political decisioning,” one “must first of all recognise the lack of... clarity and acknowledge the aporia of making a decision.”96 To begin making a decision responsibly, then, Derrida posits that

we must continually remind ourselves that some part of irresponsibility insinuates itself wherever one demands responsibility without sufficiently conceptualising and thematizing what ‘responsibility’ means; that is to say everywhere.97

The emphasised phrase here is the significant point to note: we must be aware that we default on responsibility, are irresponsible, whenever we fail to conceptualise responsibility sufficiently, that is every time we attempt such a conceptualisation, because any such conceptualisation is necessarily insufficient. That we must constantly remind ourselves is significant inasmuch as it highlights the struggle immanent to such an endeavour; this is not something that occurs spontaneously or naturally, rather it is an interventionary process.

Such an endeavour is problematic because of the difficulty of not having sufficient knowledge in light of which to make the decision. As Dillon comments, this is “no mere lack of knowledge that may be remedied,” but rather “a lack integral to the structure of any and every decision.”98 This means, for Jenny Edkins and Zehfuss, that between the “best knowledge that we may have and the decision there always remains a gap.”99 This is because, Derrida explains, “if I decide because I know, within the limits of what I know and know I

94 Beardsworth, Derrida & the Political, p. 38.
96 Zehfuss, “Writing War, Against Good Conscience,” p. 93.
98 Dillon, “Another Justice,” p. 166.
must do, then I am simply deploying a foreseeable program and there is no decision, no responsibility, no event.”¹⁰⁰ This suggests that for Derrida appealing to a known set of premises, rules or codes undermines the taking of the decision; such knowledge entails that the decision has already been taken, that the course of action is already clear and enshrined in a legitimating program. As Zehfuss shows, “although knowledge incurs our trust, knowledge is not only imperfect but also fails to provide solutions to the most difficult problems we are faced with.”¹⁰¹ Derrida similarly affirms this:

The responsibility of what remains to be decided or done cannot consist in following applying or carrying out a norm or a rule. Whenever I have at my disposal a determinable rule, I know what must be done, and as soon as such knowledge dictates the law, action follows knowledge as a calculable consequence: one knows which path to take, one no longer hesitates. The decision then no longer decides anything but is made in advance and is thus in advance annulled. It is simply deployed, without delay, presently, with the automatism attributed to machines. There is no longer any plane for justice or responsibility (whether juridical, political, or ethical).¹⁰²

This would suggest, in Campbell’s words, that

the very notion of undecidability is the condition of possibility of the decision. If the realm of thought was preordained such that there were no options, no competing alternatives, and no difficult choices to make, there would be no need for a decision.¹⁰³

In other words, the decision qua decision must be undecidable, or else it has already been taken. As Martin Hagglund confirms, “there is no opposition between undecidability and decisions in Derrida’s thinking. On the contrary, it is because the future cannot be decided in advance that one has to make decisions.”¹⁰⁴

The decision is thus responsible as a struggle or ordeal, as the isolated taking-responsibility for the deciding which is the responsibility of the one who takes the decision alone, who cannot justify this decision by legitimating it by appeal to any system of law, rights, or norms. The undecidable is, then, the profound taking of responsibility of the one who decides. As Caputo puts it,

a ‘just’ decision, a ‘judgement’ that is worthy of the name, one that responds to the demands of justice one that is more than merely legal, goes eyeball to eyeball with

¹⁰¹ Maja Zehfuss, Wounds of Memory: The Politics of War in Germany (Cambridge; New York; Melbourne; Madrid; Cape Town; Singapore; Sao Paulo: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 73.
¹⁰² Derrida, Rogues, pp. 84-85.
¹⁰³ Campbell, “The Deterriorialization of Responsibility,” p. 43
undecidability, stares it in the face (literally), looks into that abyss, and then makes that leap, that is, ‘gives itself up to the impossible decision’.\textsuperscript{105}

This leads to the notion that ethics can be possible only when one leaves aside any claim to the inherent ‘rightness’ of any particular decision based on ‘knowing’ what is right or wrong. As Derrida puts it, responsibility is possible only on the condition that the Good no longer be a transcendental objective, a relation between objective things, but the relation to the other, a response to the other; an experience of personal goodness and a movement of intention.\textsuperscript{106}

It may be inferred from this that the undecidable decision is undecidable because it is impossible to be ‘right’ due to its aporetic condition, and emphatically not because it remains undecided. The undecidable decision \textit{qua} decision is made, albeit necessarily violently. Such decisions are, in Beardsworth’s terms, “judgements [which] make up tradition. They are the decisions which institute civilization, society, law and communities...”\textsuperscript{107} Dillon rejects the “argument that we cannot know how to proceed or judge unless we do have an Archimedean point from which to take out bearings and resolve our dilemmas... [W]e do act, and have to act.”\textsuperscript{108} We are, Beardsworth concludes, confronted by the conundrum of “the necessity of judgement and... the necessity of the failure of judgement.”\textsuperscript{109}

Such inexorable failure dictates that a sense of good conscience about the decision made must always be resisted. As Zehfuss claims,

there is never a moment that allows us to look back at the decision in good conscience and feel certain about its ethicality... The belief that knowledge or rules are the secure basis for ethical decisions can never be more than a dangerous illusion that leads to nothing but ‘good conscience’, something that it is imperative to avoid.\textsuperscript{110}

This is because of the violence immanent to the taking of any decision. Dillon illustrates this point:

All decision, in short, necessarily entails a no which is indissociable from its yes. Because every yes contains a no, human being consequently has to bear the absence of the possibilities foregone in the determinate possibility that it is, in the particular historical moment in which it finds itself thrown. Somehow human being has to find the resources to bear this existence and give it its due, for this gift ‘is more difficult to bear than any loss’.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{105} Caputo, \textit{Deconstruction in a Nutshell}, p. 137.
\textsuperscript{106} Derrida, \textit{The Gift of Death}, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{107} Beardsworth, \textit{Derrida & the Political}, pp. 37.
\textsuperscript{108} Dillon, \textit{Politics of Security}, p. 144.
\textsuperscript{109} Beardsworth, \textit{Derrida & the Political}, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{110} Zehfuss, “Against Good Conscience,” p. 95.
\textsuperscript{111} Dillon, \textit{Politics of Security}, p. 68.
It is, then, the aporetic character of undecidability that is the condition of possibility of the responsible decision making, even though whatever decision is made cannot by definition be responsible in itself. The aporetic condition provides the ‘silence’ required to make the truly responsible yet undecidable decision: “This silence comes to us from the abyss.” 112 This silence, in contrast to the cacophony made by competing philosophical, political, traditional, religious, social and every other type of account which claim to encompass and speak for justice, is what makes possible responsibility by providing the space within which the decision is made. It is, Derrida states, “the gift of speech.” 113 He explains:

Without silence, without the hiatus, which is not the absence of rules but the necessity of a leap at the moment of ethical, political, or juridical decision, we could simply unfold knowledge into a program or course of action. Nothing could make us more irresponsible; nothing could be more totalitarian. 114

It is thus that, according to Beardsworth, aporia does not suspend judgement, it is the latter’s very condition of possibility. No judgement is possible without the experience of aporia. Whether one recognizes this experience of aporia or not, whether one takes this experience into account or not, is another matter. The difference of not doing so and doing so develops the difference between metaphysics and deconstruction. 115

As such, in Campbell’s terms, “undecidability is a prerequisite for responsibility.” 116 This is echoed by Dillon: “Assumption of responsibility for this unknowability – taking it on – is what makes a ‘decision’ a ‘decision’; rather than the application of judgement according to a rule, or the submission to the necessity of law... Thus ‘decision’ is that which is prepared to own responsibility for undecidability.” 117 In other words, the taking of the decision is the taking of responsibility in light of the aporetic condition within which the decision must be taken, i.e. undecidability. It is, thus, the condition of possibility of responsibility; ‘known’ codes, like the ones propounded throughout the Straussian interventions must be resisted. I would submit that a process of deconstruction amounts to one powerful means by which such ontological foreclosure may be resisted.

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113 Derrida, Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas, p. 117.
114 Derrida, Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas, p. 117 As noted in the introduction, this thesis takes seriously the Levinas’ claims that political totalitarianism is underpinned by ontological totalitarianism; such a programmatic course of action comprised of generating conceptions of what is good or right in advance forms, as I have shown, the basis on the Straussian project.
115 Beardsworth, Derrida & the Political, p. 33.
116 Campbell, “The Deteritorialization of Responsibility,” p. 44.
Deconstruction and/as Resistance

The deconstructive tradition has been subject to considerable criticism and challenge. Campbell, for instance, relays the accusation that “by questioning in a critical spirit all that is involved in the positing of the universal, a dangerous and licentious relativism is celebrated.” Similarly, as Caputo comments, “many people... associate deconstruction with the ‘end of philosophy’... with a destructive attitude towards texts and traditions and truth, towards the most honourable names in the philosophical heritage.” An apprehension relating to the condition of aporetic undecidability underpinning the deconstructive tradition can be perceived in such responses, a fear which is also discernable in Strauss’ response to the abyss. In contrast to these accounts, I would suggest that deconstruction can be viewed and mobilised as a mode of resistance to the ontological foreclosure that removes the possibility of the taking of the decision in all its undecidability.

Before turning to the question of deconstruction and/as resistance, the problem of what it is that is challenged or disrupted in such an intervention must be attended to. The question of ‘reason’ is central here. Campbell comments that it is viewed as a “principle of grounding that can secure the void left by the demise of the transcendental guarantee.” Derrida posits that the grounding or basis of the authority of reason must be explored, asking whether we obey “the principle of reason when we ask what grounds this principle which is itself a principle of grounding?” He affirms we are not. He continues: “are we dealing here with a circle or with an abyss?” The former would entail an attempt to “account for reason by reason,” which begs precisely the question. This means, he concludes, that the “abyss, the hole, the Abgrund, the empty ‘gorge’ would be the impossibility for a principle of reason to ground itself.”

Like Nietzsche and Strauss, Derrida links the operation of reason to Plato; Irene Harvey suggests that, for Derrida, Plato was responsible for the “notion of idealization as objectivity and interiority.” Derrida enacts a challenge to this “closed circle of Reason, secure in itself, with itself, excluding and thereby controlling its other and indeed all otherness – empirical, conscious, unconscious, fictive, occult and essentially non-reasonable

118 Campbell, National Deconstruction, p. 198.
119 Caputo, Deconstruction in a Nutshell, p. 4.
120 Campbell, National Deconstruction, p. 197.
and non-metaphysical." Reason is, he argues, when placed under this scrutiny, a circular and self-perpetuating system; it relies on nothing but its own premises and operation to confer its validity and conceptual reign. In other words, there is nothing outside its operation which bestows upon its apparent status of prior or originary. Seen in this way, reason then becomes simply self-justifying, makes itself a condition and part of the rules of metaphysics, a source of knowledge acquisition, in short, it "believes itself to be its own father." This is, then, an instance of what Derrida has termed the 'non-origin of origin'. In Derrida's words, "the principle of reason installs its empire only to the extent that the abyssal question of being that is hiding within it remains hidden, and with it the question of grounding itself...".

In this metaphysical schema, the exercise of reason is related to a subject; it is the speaking subject who wields this reason which pertains to acquiring knowledge. The 'I' is related to the spoken voice, Derrida asserts, which is deemed to be the locus of presence. By this he seems to point to "the absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning." This "self-present voice" is the means by which the subject gains access to "the immediate, natural and direct signification of the meaning (of the signified, of the concept, of the ideal object or what have you.)" The voice claims this authenticity, claims its proximity with the signified; the voice thus effaces the presence of the signifier in its operation and this effacement is "not simply one illusion among many – since it is the very condition of the idea of truth." Derrida explains:

The system of 'hearing (understanding) – oneself-speak' through the phonic substance – which presents itself as nonexterior, nonmundane, therefore nonempirical or noncontingent signifier – has necessarily dominated the history of the world during an entire epoch, and has even produced the idea of the world, the idea of world origin...

Thus we arrive back at the question of origin; it is this claim to 'being', this claim of the voice to relate to the pure signified which amounts it its self-justification and self-presentation as origin, of being transcendental. As in the case of, and in conjunction with, reason, the speaking subject claims to be its own origin based simply on its own self-justification.

Within this matrix of reason and the unitary subject function 'objectivity' and 'syllogistic' modes of thought. As Harvey notes, there are two possibilities at work in this claim to objectivity at work in metaphysics: the deductive argument and the inductive

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127 Derrida, Of Grammatology, p. 30.
128 Derrida, Of Grammatology, p. 20.
129 Derrida, Of Grammatology, p. 8.
argument. In the first case, this type of argument rests on the inferring of the specific from the general, from beginning with a general premise and concluding that because this general thing \(A\) is the case, this specific thing \(a\) must be true. In the second case, the reverse occurs, i.e. the general is inferred from the specific; because specific thing \(a\) is the case, general thing \(A\) must be true. Such logic, Harvey shows is

hinge[d] upon the invocation of a hierarchical system of dependence, indeed of genealogy, one might call it, which once shown to be in a certain sense illegitimate can no longer serve to legitimate other terms or functions which necessarily depend on the same.\(^{130}\)

Such modes of deduction or induction cannot, then, be sustained as self-justifying once reason has been exposed as a non-origin.

The concept of universality also resides at the heart of this schema. Universality is the condition of the general, of the generalisability of the claims made by the voice, via reason and syllogistic modes of though; it is the assumption of the general and eternal validity and applicability of the claims made within metaphysics. It is, alternatively or also, the search for the transcendental signified which lies at the heart of metaphysics. As Harvey notes, Derrida shows that this too unravels:

the essentiality in Saussure’s project is one of historically situated contingency, in fact, and that this has been defined as essentiality itself. Hence the neutrality or the universality of ‘essentiality’ is itself placed in question, since it can no longer be used, according to Derrida, as an unlimited, indeed universal, atemporal, aspatial, radically decontextualized, or decontextualizing notion.\(^{131}\)

Taken together, these functions comprise the metaphysical ‘logos’. The logos functions as a project of “mastery and in its discourse on mastery... philosophical power always seems to combine two types.” These are, on “the one hand, a hierarchy: the particular sciences and regional ontologies are subordinated to general ontology, and then to fundamental ontology.”\(^{132}\) This relates to the question of systems of dichotomous oppositions, of which the Schmittean friend/enemy distinction is a crucial instance. “On the other hand,” Derrida continues, this power functions as “an envelopment: the whole is implied, in the speculative mode of expression, in each part.”\(^{133}\) This refers to the question of central organising principles which are deemed discernable in the comprising parts. Both of these will be returned to in the following chapter. It is the logos, then, which delimits the realm and character of the knowable. As Derrida puts it, “all the metaphysical determination

\(^{130}\) Harvey, *Derrida and the Economy of Differance*, p. 51.
\(^{133}\) Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, p. xx.
of truth... are more or less immediately inseparable from the instance of the logos, or of a reason thought within the lineage of the logos.”

In summary, then, reason is mobilised by the speaking subject, which invokes the notion of objectivity through the syllogistic modes of deduction and induction in order to claim the acquisition of knowledge. This system of mastery, this knowledge acquisition, occurs within this schema which is the metaphysical logos, which advances and justifies itself by excluding the possibility of any other mode of thought by deeming it non-thought, non-sensical, non-existent. To think, to claim knowledge or truth is then, for Derrida, to necessarily be operating from within this logos – where there is meaning or the possibility of meaning, we are always already within the realm of the metaphysical logos. Thus, as long as these two systems of power operate within the logos, there can be no challenge to the philosophical system; as Derrida claims,

as long as these two types of mastery will not have been destroyed in their essential familiarity... and as long as even the philosophical concept of mastery will not have been destroyed, all the liberties taken with the philosophical order... will have been called back to order.

What is necessary, then, is a strategy of disruption that resists the reign of the logos.

In Derrida’s words, he advocates “a general strategy of deconstruction,” which “avoid[s] both simply neutralizing the binary oppositions of metaphysics and simply residing within the closed field of these oppositions, thereby confirming it.” This seems to suggest that such a strategy resists the oppositions immanent to metaphysical ontology, while also resisting the attempt to do away with them. In such gestures, deconstruction thus enacts an intervention; as Derrida notes, “I insist that deconstruction is not neutral. It intervenes.” Deconstruction aims to disrupt and disorientate the operation of the metaphysical logos. In Derrida’s terms, “perhaps deconstruction would consist, if at least it did consist, in precisely that: deconstructing, dislocating, displacing, disarticulating, disjoining, putting ‘out of joint’ the authority of the ‘is’.” What this might entail is that for every premise that ontology/metaphysics attempts to enforce, i.e. every ‘is’, this process acts as a countermove, deconstructing that which is constructed, and thereby challenging the necessary violence and exclusion of construction.

134 Derrida, Of Grammatology, p. 10
135 Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, pp. xxi-xxii
Deconstruction may be understood as challenging these hierarchising dichotomous boundaries of either/or outlined above. Harvey explains that Derrida characterises it as being comprised of “a neither this nor that (ni/ni) formulation,” which denies meaning in the metaphysical schema. “The organization of thought by metaphysics is such,” she continues, “that one asks: ‘which one?’ to each pair of binary oppositions.”139 Deconstruction refuses such an either/or formulation, denies the instalment of one or the other of two options as dominant. This entails a restlessness, a movement or momentum that resists the violence of the imposition of any premise as though it were true. This is emphatically not a process of destruction. As Derrida states:

> the movements of deconstruction do not destroy the structures from outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them in a certain way, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it.140

Through deconstruction, Derrida seeks to show that which has always been there, within metaphysics, by mobilising its own resources against it, that is, he seeks to show the limitations and contingencies which have always already been present in philosophical claims and premises but which have been obscured from view which has resulted in the logos appearing to be transcendental or originary. He does not, then, intend to overturn or destroy metaphysics, but rather to expose what has always been hidden therein, operating from a position inside it and using its own tools and premises. This is emphatically not the same as destroying that which is constructed, neither is it a refusal of the decision and of intervention. It is rather resistance to the effacement of the always only ever contingent, limited, spatially and temporally specific nature of such decisions and interventions.

In this sense, metaphysics is not replaced by deconstruction, one does not make a choice between them but, rather, a continuous relationship between them is established because the processes of deconstruction are never ‘done’ or ‘finished’; the “work of deconstruction is never to be accomplished as such.”141 This is because the work of metaphysics is also never done; the two exist in relation to each other indefinitely because “metaphysics has a tendency to resurge and return with its infinitizing project.”142 Deconstruction can, then, be seen as an invasion of the text which comes from within the text itself; it turns the rules of the text against the latter in order to show its limits and what

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141 Harvey, Derrida and the Economy of Differance, p. 28.
142 Harvey, Derrida and the Economy of Differance, p. 28.
is obscured. In Derrida’s words, it “is a question of remarking a nerve, a fold, an angle that interrupts totalization.”

Such an intervention is already explicitly politically poignant and potent. This reading is reflected in Campbell’s statement that, “deconstruction is more than an approach that problematizes seemingly coherent narratives and identities; it is an ethos that contests the way violence is implicated in all dimensions of the political and its representation.” In this sense, it is a highly politically significant intervention. As Dillon comments,

through its commitment to think and not elide the aporetic character of the co-presence of the ethical and political; through its insistence on the inescapability of assuming responsibility for that immeasurable task; and through its continuous indictment of the hubristic eclipsing of undecidability by decidedness,

deconstruction intervenes. Derrida posits that deconstruction represents the “at least necessary condition for identifying and combating totalitarian risk.” In contrast to some readings, as will be explored in Chapter Six, I would suggest that it does not, however, ensure an alternative ‘more ethical’ or ‘less bad’ position. As Hagglund notes, the “disquieting point, however, is that all decisions of justice are implicated in the logic of violence.” He continues: “Deconstruction cannot teach us what the ‘lesser violence’ is in any given case. On the contrary, deconstruction spells out why the question of violence remains forever undecidable.” Indeed, the logic of ‘lesser violence’ is itself “never innocent,” since every “definition and every measure of violence it itself violent, since it is based on decisions that are haunted by what they exclude.” What deconstruction can do, however, is resist the imposition of any particular conception of what it is to be ethical or just by continuously and endlessly destabilising teleological and ontological claims. This endless and restless destabilisation is what is meant by ‘deconstruction and/as resistance’. Thus, while it cannot it itself be deemed ethical, and it cannot lead us to the ethical, it can offer us a means by which to resist the violent and exclusionary reign of metaphysics and the imposition of any particular necessarily violent program. It remains to mobilise this strategy of deconstruction and/as resistance in the context of the Straussian logic.

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143 Derrida, *Positions*, p. 42
145 Dillon, “Another Justice,” p. 166. The latter point speaks directly to the Straussian interventions which amount to a wilful eclipsing, as chapter five will explore further.
Chapter Five
Deconstructing the Straussian Project

Introduction

The Straussian interventions can be read as being closely related to Strauss’ response to the abyssal condition. Thus, diverging from Norton’s statement that she “is sorry for the name ‘Straussian’ because it implicates Strauss in views that were not always his own,”¹ his logic has been shown to powerfully underpins these interventions. This is not to claim that Strauss would necessarily have agreed with each and every policy aim pursued by the Straussians, but rather that certain assumptions of his political thought reside at the core of their interventions. The concept of deconstruction and/as resistance can be mobilised to challenge at least three fundamental assumptions upon which the Straussian interventions are based: the mobilisation Schmittean friend/enemy binary, the question of types of ‘regime’, and the logic of justice as the ‘reason of the strongest’. These assumptions perform the function of foundational or essential premises upon which the Straussian project rests; they provide its momentum and intelligibility and make possible the project of opinion construction it propounds. Challenging them therefore disrupts the entire basis and rationale of the project, exposing its contingent and politicised nature, and undermining the processes of opinion construction central to it, thereby resisting its totalising designs.

Following this deconstruction, the chapter draws some conclusions relating to Strauss’ political philosophy, specifically positing that it can be read as a project of securitisation. Through an exploration of this contention, it demonstrates that his project may be read as conforming to and compounding the modern project he so vigorously contests; it will be shown that, paradoxically, Strauss’ attempt to repent and challenge the philosophical project of modernity leads him to reproduce precisely its logic of mastery and security. It will be shown that this project of securitisation is predicated upon a certain fear demonstrated in Strauss’ political philosophy, a fear which, I contend, is directly related to the abyssal condition. The implication of this seems to be that Strauss’ attempt to secure against and master the aporetic condition within which he found himself results in his being

¹ Norton, Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire, p. 7.
stuck within the confines of the modern project and entails the ontological totalisation which underpins the Straussian interventions.

Deconstructing the Schmittean Friend/Enemy Binary

The question of aporia is central to the Schmittean friend/enemy dichotomy; as Dillon shows, the “very lack” immanent to aporias “mobilises powerful political desires. Such desires are acted-out in performative figures of political speech; of which the friend/enemy distinction might be said to be one.”2 This binary can, then, be read as prompted by a concern with the experience of aporia. The friend/enemy binary resides at the heart of the logic of the Straussian interventions; Simon Critchley notes that, as well as reading Leo Strauss, “certain people in the Bush administration have read their Carl Schmitt.”3 For Schmitt, as Part I explored, the “specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy.”4 In other words, the fundamental relation, the condition of possibility of politics in this logic, is the dichotomous opposition between friend and enemy. Derrida states:

for Schmitt, it is indeed nothing more and nothing less than the political as such which would no longer exist without the figure of the enemy and without the determined possibility of an actual war... [T]he political itself, the being-political of the political, arises in its possibility with the figure of the enemy.5

The political is, in this formulation, fundamentally dependent upon the distinction between separate, identifiable groups of friends and enemies and upon the notion that this interrelation is one of conflict. As Derrida puts it, Schmitt “constitutes the community as a human community of combat, as a combating collectivity.”6

Immanent to this formulation is an emphasis on the idea that difference is synonymous with danger, the enemy, and that the friend is of necessity the similar one, the one who is familiar. This view, according to Campbell, “involves an axiological dimension in

2 Dillon, “Lethal Freedom.”
3 Simon Critchley, Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance (London; New York: Verso, 2007), p. 133. This is not to suggest that a reliance on a dichotomy between friends and enemies is necessarily a consequence of having read Schmitt but rather that this influence is significant in the context of the Strauss’ involvement with the former and the Straussian manifestation of this logic.
5 Derrida, The Politics of Friendship, p. 84.
6 Derrida, The Politics of Friendship, p. 86.
which the delineation of an inside from an outside gives rise to a moral hierarchy that renders the domestic superior and the foreign inferior.”7 As Maria Stern notes, this logic is predicated upon “contours dividing the included from the excluded and borders marking that which is to be made secure from the dangerous Others.”8 The dichotomy thus rests on an oppositional and antagonistic relationship between the friend and enemy, the subject and the other. This is deemed to comprise the condition of possibility of politics; in R. B. J. Walker’s terms, this amounts to the “framing of a distinction between norm and exception.”9 This relates directly to the Straussian interventions which mobilised the figure of the terrorist, the tyrant and Saddam Hussein as the enemy. In Campbell’s terms, this “renders foreign policy as a boundary-producing political performance in which the special domains of inside/outside, self/other, and domestic/foreign are constituted through the writing of threats as external dangers.”10 Such a “nationalist imaginary... requires the expulsion from the resultant ‘domestic’ of all that comes to be regarded as alien, foreign, and dangerous.”11 This formulation can be read as of a ‘political’ character; that it is of the sphere of the political and thus is emphatically not natural or essential. Accordingly, the politics at play here may be destabilised.

As Pheng Cheah and Suzanne Guerlac comment, a Derridean challenge to this involves “a deconstruction of concepts such as politics, democracy, friendship (or the friend/enemy opposition)...”12 Such a deconstruction may begin by questioning the status of the categories referred to in the binary relation. It would seem less than clear how these groups ought to be delimited. In Derrida’s words, “[e]verything in political discourse that appeals to birth, to nature or to the nation – indeed, to nations or to the universal nation of human brotherhood – this entire familiarism consists in a renaturalization of this ‘fiction’.”13 Such distinctions predicated on such supposedly solid boundaries and limits are far from self-delineating; as Derrida puts it, a
deconstruction of the genealogical schema... [would entail a destabilisation of] the name of birth, of a national naturalness which has never been what is was said to be. It would concern confidence, credit, credence, doxa or eudoxia, opinion or right

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opinion, the approbation given to filiation, at birth and at the origin, to generation, to the familiarity of the familiar, to the proximity of the neighbour...

Such a challenge does not aim to destroy the concepts operating within this formation but rather to expose their assumptions and politicised status. In his words, his challenge to these concepts is not intended “to wage war on them and to see the evil therein, but to think and live a politics, a friendship, a justice which begins by breaking with their naturalness or their homogeneity, with their alleged place of origin.” Such a challenge to the schema must explore in detail both the concept of the friend and the enemy. To address this binary, however, the relationship between self and other it presupposes must briefly be explored because the friend/enemy relation may be read as an attempt to counter the aporetic and fractured condition of the subject.

Nass explains that the subject/self

is traditionally grounded upon a notion of sovereignty that is itself grounded in the autos, that is, in the self or the selfsame, in the sovereignty of a self-positioning, self-asserting, and deciding self that has the capacity in and of itself, to affirm or deny from out of itself in order to sustain itself and assert its sovereignty as a self.

This sovereign, unitary self is thought to be the locus of action and agency since there would, Nass continues, “be no freedom, no freedom to choose, to vote, to assemble, to speak, to pledge allegiance, without the notion of a selfsame self that does the choosing, the voting, or the speaking, that is, without authority or capacity of some sovereign self.” This sovereign self is referred to by Derrida through the concept of ‘ipseity’; in his words, in using this term he intends

...to suggest the self, the one-self, being properly oneself, indeed being in person... as well as the power, potency, sovereignty, or possibility implied in every ‘I can’... [which relates] to possession, property, and power, to the authority of the lord or seignior, of the sovereign, and most often the host (hospites), the master of the house or the husband.

This notion of ipseity, of the sovereign subject, relates, Derrida explains, directly to the question of the political:

ipseity names a principle of legitimate sovereignty... what is implied, posed, presupposed, but also imposed in the very position, in the very self- or autopositioning, of ipseity itself; everywhere there is some oneself, the first, ultimate,
and supreme source of every ‘reason of the strongest’ as the right [*droit*] granted to force or the force granted to law [*droit*].

What appears to be suggested here is that the concept of the sovereign subject underpins both our understanding of individual subjects and the broader question of political sovereignty; these are, for Derrida, intimately related issues. The ipseity of the subject is closely connected to ideas surrounding the question of the political in the sense (although not only in this sense) that the latter is predicated upon the accession to dominance of one or a group of such subjects, who establish their sovereignty through the logic of the reason of the strongest, that is law and right are established as a consequence of the victory of one or more sovereign subjects over the rest. Subjects defined in this manner are, thus, oriented in a relation of struggle; the strongest, in the sense of those able to subdue the others, will dominate and establish the rules and norms necessary to legitimate their reign. In Derrida’s terms, “*t*here is no sovereignty without force, without the force of the strongest, whose reason – the reason of the strongest – is to win out over [avoir raison de] everything.”

Crucially, in this schema, sovereignty is and must remain indivisible. However, as Derrida explains,

> [t]o confer sense or meaning on sovereignty, to justify it, to find a reason for it, is already to compromise its deciding exceptionality, to subject it to rules, to a code of law, to some general law, to concepts. It is thus to divide it, to subject it to partitioning, to participation, to being shared. It is to take into account the part played by sovereignty. And to take that part or share into account is to turn sovereignty against itself, to compromise its immunity.

The immunity of sovereignty is, then, indissociable from its indivisibility; once divided, shared, justified or subjected to laws, its exceptional status is undermined and it is rendered deconstructible, open to challenge, and hence ceases to be sovereign. This means that alongside rethinking the subject comes a rethinking of the political.

Such indivisibility or exceptionality is, however, always already problematic, according to Derrida, and as such its immunity is compromised. While sovereignty cannot afford to subject itself to laws, rules or justification, it must necessarily speak of itself, assert its ipseity. In Nass’s formulation,

> sovereignty must remain silent and yet must go on speaking endlessly about its silence – protecting itself and so compromising itself, compromising itself by protecting itself, expressing and justifying itself by introducing within itself counter-sovereignties that threaten to destroy it. While sovereignty must be beyond question

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19 Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 12. The question of the ‘reason of the strongest’ will be explored below in the context of the question of justice.


and justification, indivisible and unspeakable, it must continually assert itself and meet the challenges posed to it by justifying and dividing itself.\textsuperscript{22} This means, Derrida claims, that because such justification “happens all the time, pure sovereignty does not exist; it is always in the process of positioning itself by refuting itself, by denying or disavowing itself; it is always in the process of autoimmunizing itself...”.\textsuperscript{23} We thus arrive at the concept of ‘autoimmunity’, the self-deconstructive movement of sovereignty due to its aporetic condition, the abyssal encounter. This autoimmunity entails the self-undermining of sovereignty precisely via the measures it takes to protect itself; its self-defence amounts to its self-destabilising. This applies as much for the sovereign subject as for the ruling sovereign in the demos; the ipseity of the sovereign is undermined by its self-assertion; it cannot hence be deemed unitary, self-sufficient, in short sovereign. As Wendy Brown comments, “a sovereign that suspends it sovereignty is no sovereign.”\textsuperscript{24} In Nass’ estimation, this reinforces “Derrida’s claim that autoimmunity compromises not the life of some identifiable autos but the autos itself as the foundation and guarantor of identity.”\textsuperscript{25} This renders the sovereign subject problematic; the self/subject can be said, therefore, to be autoimmune precisely as a consequence of their attempts to remain separate, autonomous or sovereign, to resist or secure themselves against the other or ‘them’. If the self or the same cannot comprise a distinct or stable autonomous group, it becomes impossible to distinguish clearly between who or what is inside and outside this category.

This shows, as Dillon notes, that the subject “was never in possession of that self-possession which was supposed to secure the certainty of itself, of a self-possession that would enable it ultimately to adjudicate everything.”\textsuperscript{26} The subject is, on the contrary, “divided from a beginning that is itself incomplete.”\textsuperscript{27} Far from a supposed wholeness, the subject finds itself in an aporetic condition; the subject “is not one, self-subsistent, uniform, stable or contained. Rather, it is plural, needful, hybrid, mobile and open.”\textsuperscript{28} This has strong implications for the concept of the ‘friend’ in the Schmittean binary; if the subject is fractured and unstable, the possibility of determining a group designated as ‘friend’ becomes radically problematic. In other words, the “‘we’s radical lack of identity,” as Beardsworth claims, “will have returned from the beginning to haunt any determination of the community.”\textsuperscript{29} This is a consequence of “the very aporeticness of the ‘we’,” which entails that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Nass, “One Nation... Indivisible;” p. 22.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Derrida, \textit{Rogues}, p. 101.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Wendy Brown, “Sovereign Hesitations,” in Cheah and Guerlac (eds.), \textit{Derrida and the Time of the Political}, p. 117.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Nass, “One Nation... Indivisible;” p. 23.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Dillon, “Another Justice,” p. 164.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Dillon, “Another Justice,” p. 157.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Dillon, \textit{Politics of Security}, p. 65.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Beardsworth, \textit{Derrida & the Political}, p. 146.
\end{itemize}
“we are continuously reconfigured,”30 because there is an “absence of any predetermined designation of what it is to be human.”31 According to Dillon,

otherness is born(e) within the self as an integral part of itself and in such a way that it always remains a stranger to itself. It derives from the lack, absence, or ineradicable incompleteness which comes from having no security of tenure within or over that of which the self is a particular hermeneutical manifestation.32

It is the aporetic lack, then, which precludes a unitary subject or group of designated as ‘friend’. In other words, all “codes of inclusion and exclusion by which the human-ness of human being renews itself and takes on specific character and identity are at issue because human-ness itself is always an issue...”33 Dillon posits:

One response to that challenge is to deny the tragic character of human being by indicting difference itself, and seeking to eradicate it. Integral to the tragic condition, therefore, is the desire to escape from it, resolving the polemos of life by turning upon the very freeing difference which constitutes it.34

The Schmittean logic mobilised by the Straussians appears to conform to precisely this move, attempting to deny and counter the challenge posed by the abyssal encounter; “Schmittean sovereignty unaccountably escapes the undecidability of the sign, however, as it decides the exception.”35 This might suggest that the designation of the category of exception or other is a means by which the subject escapes the aporetic undecidability which it would otherwise have to contend with. In other words, the other is the means by which the subject escapes its self-realisation in light of aporia by providing points of reference from which it can unproblematically distinguish itself. It shows what it is by showing what it is not, in contrast to the aporetic condition of being nothing and anything in particular, in which it is the subject’s responsibility to make decisions about itself without external guidance or given premises. Thus the friend/enemy binary is invoked to counter the aporetic condition of subjectivity; it renders the subject decided in a way that bypasses aporetic undecidability. In this logic, the subject avoids the “tragic challenge” of “how to deal with a violence that is immanent...”36 This would seem to imply that this logic residing at the heart of Strauss’ political philosophy amounts to a project of securitisation and mastery of aporia.

Due to the aporetic nature of subjectivity, then, a group designated as ‘friend’ is necessarily unstable. Derrida similarly challenges how the ‘enemy’ functions in this logic.

34 Dillon, Politics of Security, p. 151.
35 Dillon, “Lethal Freedom”.
36 Dillon, Politics of Security, p. 151.
While the Schmittean schema employed by the Straussians claims that conflict with the other is the fundamental political phenomenon, Derrida draws attention to ways in which this relationship may be read differently. He highlights the possible salutary effects of the enemy as different, for instance in the sense that “losing the enemy would not necessarily be progress, reconciliation, or the opening of an era of peace and human fraternity. It would be worse: an unheard of violence.” This is because, he continues,

[The figure of the enemy would then be helpful – precisely as a figure – because of the features which allow it to be identified as such, still identical to what has always been determined under this name... This adversary would remain a neighbour.]

In other words, Derrida suggests here that the absence of the enemy would be more dangerous than its presence because it provides the conceptual and discursive framework wherein the self is intelligible; it affords the points of reference in relation to which identity can be produced and reproduced. In this sense, then, the enemy remains the neighbour; it maintains a relation to the self which is essential for the latter to the extent that it is constituted and maintained. This may suggest, then, that the relationship between the friend and the enemy is not simply one of antagonism and competition but rather that there is a mutual interdependence latent therein. As Derrida comments, “what is said here of the enemy cannot be indifferent to what is said of the friend, since these two concepts co-determine one another.” He puts the question more forcefully:

Without an enemy, I go mad, I can no longer think, I become powerless to think myself... Without this absolute hostility, the ‘I’ loses reason, and the possibility of being posed, of posing or opposing the object in front of it; ‘I’ loses objectivity, reference, the ultimate stability of that which resists; it loses existence and presence, being, logos, order, necessity, and law. ‘I’ loses the thing itself.

What this means is that this relation, the friend to the enemy, is premised upon interdependence, even, and especially, if this relation appears to be one of conflict. The enemy provides the friends with a means by which to establish themselves and navigate the aporetic conditions such a group faces. This may be one reason why Strauss appears to insist on the importance of maintaining the binary; in the absence of a stable and determined identity and raison d’être, the figure of enemy functions in a socially salutary manner, unifying and providing a rationale for the friends. Without this figure, the ‘us’ loses its constitutive points of reference; in short, as Derrida puts it, “in mourning the enemy, I have not deprived myself of this or that, this adversary or that rival, this determined force of opposition constitutive of myself. I lose nothing more, nothing less, than the world.”

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Similarly Derrida emphasises that as well as this mutual interdependence, the friend/enemy binary is complicated in a second and related way, namely the impossibility of distinguishing finally between them. It could be argued that the Schmittean logic could still be defensible even if the interrelation between the friend and the enemy should be understood differently as mutually interdependent, rather than mutually struggling. The Derridean critique exceeds this, however, challenging the reliance on this dichotomy still further. Derrida cites Schmitt as claiming that the enemy is not some private individual but must, rather, be a group and a public, politically located group, against which the group of the self and its friends is oriented. This is significant because, Derrida surmises, “the antithesis of friendship in the political sphere is not, according to Schmitt, enmity but hostility.” This hostility differs from enmity, Derrida continues, to the extent that “sentiments would play no role; there would be neither passion nor effect in general.”

This absence of hatred leads, Derrida suggest, to a first possibility of semantic slippage and inversion: the friend (amicus) can be an enemy (hostis); I can be hostile towards my friend, I can be hostile towards him publically, and conversely I can, in private, love my enemy.

The absence of hatred in the Schmittean schema relied upon by the Straussians thus undermines the supposed distinction between the friend and the enemy; if all that is required is hostility, this can be directed towards both the friend and the enemy, rendering them indistinguishable in Schmitt’s own formulation. Derrida thus concludes that “the two concepts (friend/enemy) consequently intersect and ceaselessly change places... Hence, every time, a concept bares the phantom of the other. The enemy the friend, the friend the enemy.”

This blurring is further compounded by Derrida. In response to the question of who the enemy is or should be, he proposes that the latter is identifiable only within the question put to the self of who the enemy is:

Who is my enemy? How is he to be recognized but in the very question, which puts me in question? The question is no longer a theoretical question, a question of knowledge or of recognition, but first of all, like recognition in Hegel, a calling into question, an act of war.

What appears to be intimated here is that this question of who the enemy is asks equally who the self is, who the I is, who has this enemy, who it is that has the enemy. In other words, it

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41 Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, p. 87. This echoes Strauss claim that citizens should feel a ‘disinterested dislike’ for foreigners explored in Chapter Two; enmity is not necessary, rather a performative hostility characterises this encounter.


demands of the I an account of itself through which its enemy might be identified. The question of who the enemy is amounts, then, to an act of aggression, a fundamental calling into question, demanding an account, inasmuch as it asks simultaneously ‘who are you that has an enemy?’ The enemy may, then, be said to be the question, or the person who puts the question of who the enemy is. However, this is further complicated by Derrida’s assertion that such a calling into question can never occur by something exterior to the self:

We then went from ‘calling into question’ to ‘calling oneself into question’. The enemy in question is he who calls into question, but he can call into question only someone who can call himself into question. One can be called into question only in calling oneself into question.45

This implies that calling into question of the self can only occur by the self; no external force can call the self into question without the cooperation of the self. This means, then,

the enemy is oneself, I myself am my own enemy... I am, myself, the other who puts me in question, puts myself in question, the other is my brother, my brother is my enemy... the enemy [is] he who is at one and the same time the closest, the most familiar, the most familial, the most proper.46

The distinction between the friend and the enemy all but vanishes here; each can be all. This destabilisation of clear cut distinctions is fundamentally problematic, indeed intolerable for Schmitt and for Strauss. As Derrida explains, with reference to the Geneva Conventions,

Schmitt accuses them of having ‘weakened’ – indeed compromised – the ‘system of essential distinctions’: war and peace, the military and the civilian, enemy and criminal, interstate war and civil war... The normalizations of compromise that the law then proposed would be, for Schmitt, but fragile gangways above the ‘abyss’.47

This suggests that Derrida viewed the Schmitt-inspired Straussian reliance of essential categories of friend and enemy, as well as others, as but an attempt to lay a firmer path above the abyss.

Derrida concludes from this that the Schmittean discourse relied upon by Strauss can be seen to be autoimmune; in its attempt to defend itself against the instability of its own categories and borders, in particular the friend/enemy binary, it invokes impossible a priori categories, struggling against the danger of the abyss, and in doing so self-undermines. This would appear to reinforce the idea that the filling in or avoidance of the abyss can only lead to self-destruction; it is only taking the aporetic conditions into account and embracing self-deconstruction, renouncing the construction of absolutes and a priori premises that this autoimmunity may be productive, generating new ways of thinking. Derrida appears to concur with this; in relation to his citation of Schmitt he states: “this passage takes place, it

rushing into place, precisely where the abyss of a distinction happens to be filled up. The passage consists in fact in a denial of the abyss."48 This is because “the concept of the enemy is deduced or constructed a priori, both analytically and synthetically – in a synthetic a priori fashion, if you like, as a political concept or, better yet, as the very concept of the political.”49 The Straussian’s use of Schmitt resorts to this supposed a priori because, as Derrida comments, as the borders delimiting the friend and the enemy are “threatened, fragile, porous, contestable... the Schmittean discourse collapses. It is against the threat of this ruin that his discourse takes form. It defends itself, walls itself up, reconstructs itself unendingly against what is to come...”50 Such a defence or walling up resides at the heart of the Straussian logic against the condition of aporia faced by the subject. Thus a deconstruction of the logic of the friend/enemy binary can be seen as a means by which to resist the foreclosing of ontological designs which aim to impose clear and unproblematic points of reference from which identity and difference may be established.

Deconstructing the ‘Tyrannous Regime’

The Straussian attempt to rehabilitate a focus on the question of the ‘regime’, in particular mobilising the notion of ‘tyranny’, may also be addressed through deconstruction and/as resistance. The invocation of the concept of tyranny invites a contrast with a morally superior democratic regime; it functions as a means by which to delegitimate particular regimes in comparison with other, more ‘democratic’ regimes. Derrida comments explicitly on Fukuyama’s development of the concept of democracy in Spectres of Marx. Fukuyama presents contemporary US democracy as, in Matthias Fritsch’s words, “the sole incarnation of justice at the ‘end of history’ after the breakdown of the Soviet Union.”51 Derrida relates Fukuyama’s thesis to “the tradition of Leo Strauss, relayed by Allan Bloom,” in which its author declares that “the greater part of humanity” should and will move towards emulating “existing ‘liberal democracy’.”52 To begin exposing the tensions within this formulation, Derrida invokes the question of aporia residing at the heart of democracy. He comments that democracy is “a concept that is inadequate to itself, a word hollowed out at its centre by a vertiginous semantic abyss that compromises all translations and opens onto all kinds of

52 Derrida, Specters of Marx, p. 70.
autoimmune ambivalences and antimonies.” By this, he seems to suggest that democracy is an aporetic concept which tends towards its own self-deconstruction.

This abyssal condition has several dimensions, including, as Paul Patton notes, “the paradoxical opposition and complicity between force and law and... the tension at the heart of the concept of justice between treating everyone the same and respecting the singularity of each individual case.” Alluding to the issues raised in the above discussion of the sovereign, he continues, “[t]here is also a tension between democracy’s commitment to inclusivity and to exclusivity that emerges in political disagreements over who are the people who make up the sovereign and the conditions by which membership is determined.” This is compounded by the autoimmune tendency that resides at the heart of democracy:

A democratic state may either allow enemies of democracy to seize power by democratic means or it may seek to prevent this by interrupting or suspending democratic freedoms. Either way the outcome is dangerous for democracy... The suspension of democratic procedures to protect democracy or the suspension of civil liberties to protect the freedom of citizens are examples of this logic of autoimmunity in the political sphere.

What is suggested here has to do with Derrida’s concern with democracy’s tendency to attack itself when it perceives itself threatened. He illustrates this propensity through an examination of the conflict in Algeria, claiming that it is “typical of all the assaults on democracy in the name of democracy.” He describes the situation of the threat of non-democratic forces winning power through democratic means, commenting that the

Algerian government and a large part, although not a majority, of the Algerian people (as well as people outside Algeria) thought that the electoral process under way would lead to the end of democracy. They thus preferred to put an end to it themselves. They decided in a sovereign fashion to suspend, at least provisionally, democracy for its own good, so as to take care of it, so as to immunize it against a much worse and very likely assault.

The crucially aporetic condition of democracy is then, for Derrida, its propensity to revoke that which makes it democratic under conditions of perceived threat; it destroys itself when faced with a challenge from forces of non-democracy. As Chapter Three demonstrated, examples of such suspension occurred following 9/11, and importantly, the Straussians supported the implementation of such restrictions. This can clearly be seen in relation to those operating in PNAC and AVOT, for example, who systematically called for the passing of the PATRIOT Act and other measures which undermined the civil and political rights of citizens and non-citizens under the perceived conditions of the threat from terrorism, rogue

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53 Derrida, Rogues, p. 72.
56 Derrida, Rogues, p. 33.
states, and so forth. The implication here may be, then, that the Straussian, like Derrida, were aware of the aporetic condition of democracy; in contrast to his position, however, they prescribed precisely the measures Derrida warns embody its autoimmune tendency, thereby sealing its fate.

As explored above, for Strauss the legacy of ‘tyrannous’ regimes, in particular the Nazi’s accession to power, signalled the need to shore democracy up against the possibility of such undemocratic forces prevailing. Derrida seems to share this concern, positing that there “is something paradigmatic in this autoimmune suicide: fascist and Nazi totalitarianisms came to power or ascended to power through formally normal and formally democratic electoral processes.”

Thus, both Strauss and Derrida recognise the danger that is immanent to democracy. The difference between the Straussian and Derridean positions on this issue may be observed in their respective responses to the following question posed by the latter: “must a democracy leave free and in position to exercise power those who risk mounting an assault on democratic freedoms and putting an end to democratic freedom in the name of democracy?” Strauss answers in the negative; democracy cannot withstand the threat of undemocratic challenge so must be reinforced and protected through the construction of totalising opinion. In contrast Derrida answers in the affirmative. This is not because he understands the dangers posed to democracy by non- or anti-democratic forces to be any less profound than Strauss; on the contrary, it is due to the seriousness of the threat that he responds in this way.

For Derrida, the challenge to democracy comes not from some alien, external force but rather from within its own aporetic structure; any attempt to defend or protect itself involves its sacrifice due to the measures employed in such a defence which render it undemocratic. As Hagglund notes, “to ‘be sure, the essential corruptibility of democracy can have the most devastating effects. But for Derrida corruptibility is also the possibility for anything to happen.’”

The Straussian interventions, indeed Strauss’ position more generally, may thus be read as falling into the trap of destroying democracy in an, at least ostensible, attempt to protect it. In Strauss’ attempt to avoid the possibility of the accession of another Nazism by advocating a vision of democracy which lacks the characteristics of a meaningful democracy, for instance freedom of information, an educated, critical populace with the freedom to assemble and publish, and a multiplicity of competing perspectives and corresponding debate, in short by deeming democracy too vulnerable to allow these activities, he destroys democracy. What this means is that Straussianism kills democracy by

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57 Derrida, Rogues, p. 33.
58 Derrida, Rogues, p. 34.
insisting that the risks immanent to it be secured against. The Straussian thus pedal a rhetorical fiction of existing democracy as a natural or universal good, imposing a totalising ontological discourse which itself precludes democracy understood as perpetual contestation.

Derrida challenges this foreclosure by insisting on taking the risk of such dangers and resisting the notion of existing democracy as a foundational good. It is thus the case that, Derrida notes, “it has always been difficult, and for essential reasons, to distinguish rigorously between the goods and the evils of democracy... They are hardly different.” Here Derrida notes that the ‘good’ of democracy, ‘freedom’, is impossible to protect from its ‘evil, understood as ‘licence’. As Burke reiterates, democracy is “at once liberty, licence and instrumental power.” This blurring occurs in the sense that the removing the evils of democracy, shoring it up against its own autoimmunity, results in its demise; in attempting to curtail licence, freedom too is sacrificed. This is a consequence of democracy’s aporetic nature. However, in contrast to Strauss, Derrida proposes that this incompleteness can itself be productive.

Derrida claims that as a system which is never equal to itself, never without a self-deconstructive tendency, democracy is unique among modes of governance. As he explains, I believe that what distinguishes the idea of democracy from all other ideas of political regimes – monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, and so on – is that democracy is the only political system, a model without a model, that accepts its own historicity, that is, its own future, which accepts its self-criticism, which accepts its perfectibility.

As Campbell notes the “radical indeterminacy, akin to deconstructive thought, that is at democracy’s heart and is its most politically original feature.” What this may suggest is that, while other forms of regime posit essential foundations or rely upon a teleological narrative, democracy is capable of adaptation, self-criticism, self-deconstruction; it can, in other words, exist without claiming some prior or essential right and can respond to that which comprises it, the demos. According to Fritsch, “[t]he notion of infinity, of unavoidable incompletion, translates the (perhaps exclusively) democratic insight that no political principle or system, no law or universal ethics, can by itself be simply called just...” As Hagglund affirms, democracy

60 Derrida, Rogues, p. 21.
62 Derrida, in Cherif, Islam and the West, p. 42.
63 Campbell, National Deconstruction, p. 196.
is not an ideal, and it cannot serve to justify political investments... What Derrida calls democracy to come is precisely the impossibility of such final justification... one cannot posit an absolute democracy even as a theoretical fiction.\(^{65}\)

This implies that the danger immanent to incompleteness of democracy is simultaneously its virtue; it is the only system capable of functioning in the explicit acknowledgment of its own imperfection and historical specificity, and adapting accordingly. In Laclau’s terms,

> a society is democratic, not insofar as it postulates the validity of a certain type of social organization and of certain values vis-à-vis others, but insofar as it refuses to give its own organization and its own values the status of a fundamentum inconcussum.\(^{66}\)

As Derrida notes, democracy is the only system “that welcomes the possibility of being contested, of contesting itself, of criticising and indefinitely improving itself.” Crucially for the present purpose, he continues, democracy is “responsive in as responsible a fashion as possible, I would say, to the aporia or undecidability on the basis of which – a basis without basis – this regime gets decided.”\(^{67}\) What this seems to imply is that democracy can be understood for Derrida as the only form of government which takes into account, indeed is predicated upon, the aporetic conditions underpinning it. These conditions underpin any regime, yet it is only democracy which may resist the urge to obscure, avoid or surmount them. As Dillon attests, democracy to come “would thus be – always already is – the forestalling of the foreclosing of this questionability, even in its own foreclosing.”\(^{68}\)

> It is this resistance to foreclosure which entails that democracy as such can never exist in the sense of presence; while, as Norton comments, “Schmitt disavows democracy Derrida defers it. Democracy is, Derrida writes, a venir, to come.”\(^{69}\) In Derrida’s words, he speaks of democracy to come

> because it is the only name for a political regime which declares its historicity and its perfectibility, in that it carried in its concept the dimension of inadequation and of that which is to come. Democracy allows us in all liberty to invoke these two openings publicly in order to criticise the current state of so-called democracy.\(^{70}\)

What this means is, in Fritsch’s words, is that

> if one criticizes democracy... one does so in the name of democracy, in the name of a democracy to come. Even if one criticizes democracy itself, one is authorized to do so (and thus already encompassed) by democracy. For democracy, by granting the right to free speech, free assembly, and a free press, is the form of political organization

\(^{67}\) Derrida, “Autoimmunity,” p. 121.
\(^{68}\) Dillon, “The Scandal of the Refugee,” p. 120.
\(^{70}\) Derrida, “Intellectual Courage: An Interview”.
that calls for its own critique and that admits its fundamental revisability, and openness to challenge, of its own self-understanding.\textsuperscript{71}

The ‘to come’ means, then, not that some ideal democracy will arrive in some present future but rather that democracy’s aporetic nature entails that it is, and will always be, a process, a movement responsive to changing ideas, pressures and interventions. “Stasis, for the ethos of democracy, is death,”\textsuperscript{72} as Campbell puts it.

One of the ways in which the question of the ‘to come’ is discussed by Derrida is in terms of what he calls the ‘messianic’. As he explains, “[w]hat I mean by ‘messianicity’ is the general structure of our relation to what is coming. Usually, we call this the future.”\textsuperscript{73}

However, the use of the word ‘future’ is problematic here, he explains, because “if by ‘future’ one understands a modality of the present, the present of tomorrow, then we would find again some reduction to the living present that I would like to avoid. So,” he concludes, “that’s why I say ‘to come’ rather than the future.”\textsuperscript{74} This use of the ‘to come’ might, then, be read as an attempt to avoid teleological or prescribed relationship with the future: “[t]he messianic is a general structure in which the ‘to-come’ is absolutely undetermined, absolutely undetermined, and of course I cannot close, I cannot circumscribe this relation to the ‘to come’.”\textsuperscript{75} While its connections to a theological tradition are clear, and indeed controversial, as will be explored further below, Derrida insists on a distinction between messianicity and messianism in a similar manner as he distinguishes between the ‘to come’ and the future:

In messianism you have at least the figure and identity of the Messiah – even if the Messiah is not here – you know what the Messiah should be, who he should be and so on and so forth. Whereas in the messianicity that I refer to there is no such anticipation.\textsuperscript{76}

What this means, he explains, is that because we must engage with the aporia of justice which precludes being just or certain, this concept of messianicity is one wherein no figure of the Messiah is possible, no anticipation of the future or the arrivant is possible. In his words, “messianicity means that it’s impossible to have this certainty;” this, he continues, “could be a good criterion to locate the difference between messianicity and messianism.”\textsuperscript{77} What this seems to indicate is that, in Derrida’s words, “Messianism means that the uncertainty is not and will never be under control, and should never be under control...”\textsuperscript{78} Therefore, the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{71} Fritsch, “Derrida’s Democracy to Come,” p. 579.
  \item \textsuperscript{72} Campbell, \textit{National Deconstruction}, p. 202.
  \item \textsuperscript{73} Derrida, “Time and Memory,” p. 67.
  \item \textsuperscript{74} Derrida, “Time and Memory,” p. 67.
  \item \textsuperscript{75} Derrida, “Time and Memory,” p. 68.
  \item \textsuperscript{76} Derrida, “Time and Memory,” p. 68.
  \item \textsuperscript{77} Derrida, “Time and Memory,” p. 69
  \item \textsuperscript{78} Derrida, “Time and Memory,” p. 69.
\end{itemize}
structure of the ‘to come’, the messianic imperative, can be read as amounting to a conceptual response to the abyssal or aporetic condition.

The ‘to come’ is, then, not a temporary condition which will someday be ended by the attainment of perfect democracy but rather a permanent state of change, flux, self-creation and re-creation. Democracy can never be realised; it is rather this endless process. The ‘to come’ means that democracy can never finally be anything in particular, and that this is its fundamental strength; it is a process, a simultaneously self-constituting and self-deconstructing series of relations, and as such the only system which attends to and works in light of, rather than to (always unsuccessfully) obscure, the abyss underpinning it and every other mode of governance. It thus reflects the perpetual restlessness and momentum of deconstruction and/as resistance. This stands in marked contrast to Fukuyama’s teleological, or in Derrida’s estimation, ‘neo-evangelical’ vision of democracy, which is necessarily autoimmune due, at least in part, to its attempted ‘channel-jamming’ and the “sleight-of-hand” trick through which it presents the march towards democracy as at once “an empirical event” and a “trans-historic and natural ideal” in order to avoid taking account of the empirical events which would undermine or contradict his insistence on the end of history.79 Fukuyama’s Straussian logic can be described as a messianism with a known and anticipated, if not already realised, messiah, while Derrida’s messianic democracy ‘to come’ rejects the possibility of such an arrival. Democracy to come thus opens “up a space in which the definition of the ideal, and of the meaning of such fundamental terms as freedom and equality, remains open-ended.”80 What this implies, Fritsch explains, would be

a turn to the open future as democracy’s own implication, and the resulting recognition of the contingency and instability of a nation and its borders, would imply an originary dislocation of the ‘natural’ community, the native place, and the nation-state.81

This refusal to foreclose would signal disaster in the Straussian logic, within which the social meaning of such terms as freedom and equality, and the naturalness of the friend/enemy distinction, the legitimate and the rogue state, and so forth, must be understood not as provisional and adaptable opinions but rather as essential or universal for society to function. In contrast, the Derridean move aims to take responsibility through a refusal to present existing democracy as an ‘is’; it defers and resists the ontological foreclosure immanent to any conception of democracy as ‘present’.

79 Derrida, Specters of Marx, p. 86.
Deconstructing Justice as the Reason of the Strongest

As Cornell, Rosenfeld and Carlson point out, “[a]t least by its critics, deconstruction has been associated with cynicism towards the very idea of justice. Justice, so the story goes, demands reconstruction, not deconstruction.” Against this, the following will demonstrate that the question of justice resides at the heart of Derrida’s political thought, and that it may only, in his account, be aimed towards through deconstruction. As he comments, “[w]hat is currently called deconstruction would not correspond (though certain people have an interest in spreading this confusion) to a quasi-nihilistic abdication before the ethico-politico-juridical question of justice...” Rather, he explains, “a deconstructive line of questioning is through and through a problematization of law and justice. A problematization of the foundations of law and justice.” Such a deconstruction resists the notion that justice consists in the ‘reason of the strongest’. 

As Chapter One explored, Strauss approached the question of justice with reference to the discussion between Socrates and Thrasymachus in Plato’s Republic on the subject. Strauss claims that “Thrasymachus contends that justice is the advantage of the stronger, that it is the other fellow’s good, i.e. good only for the receiver and bad for the giver; so far from being art it is folly; accordingly, he praises injustice.” Strauss contends that Thrasymachus’ logic emerges victorious: “Thrasymachus’ view, according to which the private good is supreme, triumphs.” Derrida’s discussion in Rogues of the question of justice locates the problem in the very same Socratic dialogue. He states:

This problematic – always open, abyssal, chaotic – runs from at least Plato (for example, from Callicles’ discourse in the Gorgias or Thrasymachus’s in the Republic, both of which maintain that the just or the right [dike, dikaion] is on the side of or in the interest of the strongest), to Machiavelli, Hobbes, and... Pascal...

However, in contradistinction to Strauss, for whom this logic of justice as the advantage of the stronger appears convincing, Derrida challenges it, claiming that such a formulation necessitates a “reinterpretation or reactivation of an enormous traditional problematic...” In “Force of Law,” Derrida cites Pascal’s assessment of the position of Montaigne as stipulating that

82 Cornell et al., Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice, p. ix.
85 Strauss, The City and Man, p. 74.
86 Strauss, The City and Man, p. 81.
87 Derrida, Rogues, p. 92.
88 Derrida, Rogues, p. 92.
one man says that the essence of justice is the authority of the legislator, another that it is the convenience of the king, another that it is current custom; and the latter is the closest to the truth: simple reasons tell us that nothing is just in itself; everything crumbles with time. Custom is the sole basis for equity, for the simple reason that it is received; it is the mystical foundation of is authority. Whoever traces it to its source annihilates it.\textsuperscript{89}

This illustrates the concern underpinning the Straussian position very well. That justice is predicated upon, in this schema, simply inherited wisdom, the power of the status quo, in short upon ‘mystical foundations’ as opposed to anything essential or absolute, entails that it must not be subject to scrutiny. Undertaking a tracing of its basis would result in its destruction, through its exposure as contingent. It thus relies, like democracy in the Straussian logic, on legitimating fictions; exposing its aporetic or abyssal condition would entail its annihilation. This means, then, that in the absence of stable foundations, a mystical foundation exists and must be relied upon. This also means that justice is the same as law or rights in this account; because it does not exist \textit{a priori}, justice inheres, in this logic, in the laws or rules customary in society, which, as was explored above, emanate from the will and reason of the strongest. In direct contrast to this, Derrida states: “since the origin of authority, the foundation or ground, the position of the law can’t by definition rest on anything but themselves, they are in themselves a violence without ground.”\textsuperscript{90} As Campbell reaffirms, “when pursued with respect to the grounds that given them legitimacy, the sources upon which those discourses rest can be considered ‘mystical.’”\textsuperscript{91}

Such mystical foundations are discernable, for instance, in the US Declaration of Independence, a political moment focused upon by the Straussians and also by Derrida. The Declaration is frequently appealed to by the Straussians, in particular by Jaffa, and as a foundational event, one which ought to be relied upon and revivified in the US.\textsuperscript{92} Derrida shows, however, the assumptions and tensions residing within it. Derrida notes:

One cannot decide... whether independence is stated or produced by this utterance... Is it that the good people have already freed themselves in fact and are only stating the fact of this emancipation in [\textit{par}] the Declaration? Or is it rather that they free themselves at the instant of and by [\textit{par}] the signature of this Declaration?\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{89} Pascal, cited in Derrida, “Force of Law,” pp.11-12.
\textsuperscript{92} See for instance Harry V. Jaffa, \textit{A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War} (Lanham; Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).
In other words, as Campbell notes, “the declaration invokes the authority of the people [but]
they do not exist as a people, and those who sign have no pre-established basis for doing
so.” 94 As Beardsworth reiterates,

the union of states is described as predating the signature of the declaration; at the
same time, it is only produced through the signature... The declaration of the republic
straightforwardly represents the will of the people prior to the act of declaring, and
yet this will is only first invented through this act. 95

This erases the temporality, contingency, and immanent violence of the act of founding,
which can only be justified after the event in terms it directs. Thus, Derrida suggests, one
“can understand this Declaration as a vibrant act of faith, as a hypocrisy indispensible to a
politico-military-economic, etc. coup of force, or, more simply, more economically, as the
analytic and consequent deployment of a tautology.” 96 Thus the violence of the founding,
the coup de force immanent to the act of founding is exposed, and therewith the mystical
foundations of authority. In Campbell’s terms, “such structures exist and exercise power
because the interpretive and performative coup de force that brings them into being occludes
the mystery within that unfounded process.” 97 The premises and opinions of the founding
are thereby exposed as politicised and contingent in nature, operating with explicitly political
effects. As Dillon posits, when the founding fathers

confferred upon the new individual certain inalienable rights, they did not only enact
an extraordinary new political mythology. They were also always very careful to
qualify inalienable rights with membership of the right group, thus inaugurating a
new mode of differentiation between native and stranger. 98

Thus, as Beardsworth notes, “the foundation of any law is necessarily violent, excluding in
the very move to inaugurate new possibilities of inclusion.” 99 He continues: “Political
interventions, like the American Declaration of Independence, could be rewritten, perhaps,
with this in mind.” 100

This means that far from embodying justice or its semblance, as they must in the
Straussian schema, “law is essentially deconstructible, whether because it is founded,
constructed on interpretable and transformable textual strata,... or because its ultimate
foundation is by definition unfounded.” 101 As Campbell reiterates, “the containers of politics

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95 Beardsworth, Derrida & the Political, p. 99.
97 Campbell, National Deconstruction, p. 183.
98 Dillon, “Another Justice,” p. 171.
99 Beardsworth, Derrida & the Political, p. 42.
100 Beardsworth, Derrida & the Political, p. 102.
are indispensably deconstructible because their foundations of authority are ‘mystical’.\textsuperscript{102} That these foundations are mystical is related directly by Richard Kearney to the condition of aporia: “Derrida actually uses the term ‘mystical’ to name ‘the aporia or abyss opened up by the deconstructability of law’.”\textsuperscript{103} What this suggests is that while for Strauss the foundationlessness of justice demands that its basis not be scrutinised, that law should masquerade as justice, for Derrida this groundlessness invites attention, specifically deconstruction. In short, Derrida challenges and undermines the mystical foundations upon which justice is based in the Straussian conception. Indeed Cornell posits that, for Derrida, “it is the question of the ultimate ground or correctly stated lack of such that \textit{must} be asked, if we are to heed the call of justice.”\textsuperscript{104} She explains that this schema relies upon these mystical foundations appearing to be essential foundations: “what is ‘rotten’ in a legal system is precisely the erasure of its own mystical foundations of authority so that the system can dress itself up as justice.”\textsuperscript{105} Like sovereignty and democracy, the concept of justice is, then, according to Derrida, predicated upon aporetic conditions. It is these conditions, which necessitate in the Straussian logic the reliance upon mystical foundations, which demonstrates that law and justice are not one and the same.

Justice is not, then, for Derrida, reducible to any particular set of laws or rights; it consists not in laws but rather in the continued deconstruction of laws. In his terms, “justice does not end with law. Nor even with duties (\textit{devoirs})... We must thus be dutiful beyond duty, we must go beyond law, tolerance, conditional hospitality, economy, and so on.” However, he continues, “to go beyond does not mean to discredit that which we exceed.”\textsuperscript{106} This implies that while justice is not reducible to these notions and practices, these must not be discarded or ignored; that they do not in themselves amount to justice does not render them expendable. Herein, Derrida explains, lies one dimension of the aporia of justice; this exposes the “difficulty of a responsible transaction between two orders or, rather, between order and its beyond. Whence all these aporias, and the inevitability of an autoimmunitary risk.”\textsuperscript{107} Derrida thus points to the aporetic condition of justice.

This aporetic state can be read in at least two ways. Firstly, as Dillon explains, for Derrida “[i]t is impossible to become just. Justice is a responsibility that continuously devolves upon us because it is always ‘to come’... That there will never be justice is the

\textsuperscript{102} Campbell, \textit{National Deconstruction}, p. 183.
\textsuperscript{103} Kearney, “Derrida’s Ethical Re-Turn,” p. 36.
\textsuperscript{105} Cornell, “The Violence of the Masquerade,” p. 90.
\textsuperscript{106} Derrida, “Autoimmunity,” p. 133.
\textsuperscript{107} Derrida, “Autoimmunity,” p. 133.
condition of possibility for us to continuously attend to the incessant call of justice.” What this suggests is that within the concept of justice resides its impossibility, its unattainability, as well as its command that it be moved towards, attended to. This amounts, it would seem, to a contradictory or unrealisable imperative. The aporia of justice can thus be viewed as the tension between its conditional, hence calculable dimension, i.e. law, rights, and its unconditional, incalculable dimension, understood as absolute, unattainable justice. As Derrida explains,

[O]n the one hand, you have the law which is deconstructible; that is, the set of legislations, the set of positive laws which are in constant transformation... On the other hand, justice, in the name of which one deconstructs the law, is not deconstructible. So you have two heterogeneous concepts... the law and justice. 109

The problem is, he continues, that these two concepts are not separable: “despite this radical heterogeneity between the two, they are indissociable.” The one is reflective of and attends to the other, or else the two mutually implicate each other: “if you want to be just, you have to improve the law. And if you improve the law – that is, deconstruct the previous system – it is in order to be more just, to tend to justice.” The aporetic condition can, then, be viewed as the impossibility of making possible the impossible, or attempting to move towards unconditional justice through the exercise of the conditional.

The aporia of justice can simultaneously be read as relating to the incompatible demands of, as Derrida puts it, “on the one hand a respect for universality, and on the other for singularity,” meaning that “you cannot be just for everyone and for every single one... I have to be responsible for the Other and just for the Other... but if I am true to this, I am already betraying a third one.” While this is by no means a thorough survey of the aporetic condition of justice, what is suggested is that immanent to the notion are multiple insoluble tensions and problems. In Derrida’s words,

these problems are not infinite simply because they are infinitely numerous, nor because they are rooted in the infinity of memories and cultures (religious, philosophical, juridical, and so forth) that we shall never master. They are infinite, if we may say so, in themselves, because they require the very experience of the aporia... There is no justice without this experience, however impossible it may be, of aporia. Justice is an experience of the impossible. 113

What this suggests is, then, that justice is impossible, unattainable due to its aporetic condition but simultaneously that justice is impossible without the experience of aporia. We

111 Derrida, “Justice, Colonisation, Translation,” p. 86.
113 Derrida, “Force of Law”, p. 16.
are faced then with the aporia of the aporia, or the abyssal dimensions of the aporia; the aporia makes what appeared to be possible impossible, whilst simultaneously making this impossibility possible yet unrealisable, in other words, it removes the possibility of attaining justice while concurrently being the condition of possibility for attending to this impossible goal, which nevertheless demands pursuit.

This would seem to expose an unjustified assumption in the Straussian position inasmuch as while justice is also unattainable for them, this has the consequence that the reason of the strongest prevails, that the conditional practices and processes identified by Derrida can be utterly dispensed with as self-seeking endeavours pursued in their stead. This may also be put as while for Derrida responsibility entails that the limited, conditional order of justice to be maintained and negotiated in light of an unknown and unattainable unconditional justice, for the Straussians the impossibility of the latter implies that anything goes, that the conditional order may be rejected entirely, or used to the advantage of the strongest. What this seems to indicate is that while for Strauss justice in itself is but a semblance of itself consisting in rules, norms and law constructed and directed by the strong, which must not be scrutinised or examined lest their foundationlessness be exposed, for Derrida it is precisely through such a challenge to the mystical foundations, demonstrating them to be groundless, that justice may be moved towards. It is thus that Derrida claims deconstruction is justice. What he seems to mean by this is not that whatever deconstruction arrives at, at a particular juncture, is of necessity just but rather that deconstruction as a limitless and constant task is a movement towards justice because it never rests, it constantly seeks to challenge and destabilise any claim to embody justice or have attained knowledge of the truly just. It is just insofar as it precludes any particular configuration of justice from establishing itself, through the erasure of its mystical foundations, as universally or essentially just. This may also be put in terms deconstruction and/as resistance; such restlessness and momentum disrupts the instantiation of any particular conceptualisation of laws as justice as though absolute or universal, thereby undermining the logic of the reason of the strongest.

In a similar manner to the promise of democracy, Derrida frames the question of justice in terms of ‘to come’, in the sense of an unknown and unknowable non-present future, a messianic promise, one without the expected arrival of a known figure pertaining to resolution or teleological satisfaction. As Fritsch comments,
[u]ltimately uncodifiable and without guarantee, justice, then, has to remain to come, against all desire for a good conscience. In other words, justice has to be what I would call a post-utopian promise that will never be fulfilled as such.\textsuperscript{114} While this entails that justice will never be attained or arrived at, this leads, Derrida insists, not “to injustice, nor to the effacement of an opposition between just and unjust but may... lead to a reinterpretation of the whole apparatus of boundaries within which a history and a culture have been able to confine their criteriology.”\textsuperscript{115} He explains:

That justice exceeds law and calculation, that the unpresentable exceeds the determinable cannot and should not serve as an alibi for staying out of juridical-political battles... Left to itself, the incalculable... can always be reappropriated by the most perverse calculation.\textsuperscript{116}

What this may suggest is that because unattainable justice is not, there are any number of forces which can claim to speak in its name; its non-presence leaves it vulnerable to appropriation by all. This means, he continues, that

not only must we calculate... but we must take it as far as possible, beyond the place we find ourselves and beyond the already identifiable zones of morality or politics, or law, beyond the distinction between national and international, public and private, and so on.\textsuperscript{117}

This seems to imply that for Derrida the impossibility of justice as a present-being set of principles requires a vigilance towards any and all attempts to speak in its name; it thus requires calculation, it entails, he continues, that “each advance in politicization obliges one to reconsider, and so to reinterpret the very foundations of law such as they had previously been calculated or delimited.”\textsuperscript{118} This would seem to apply directly to the Straussian interventions, in which boundaries and limits between friends and enemies, legitimate and illegitimate violence, legal and illegal, rogue and democratic states, terrorists and heroes, in short just and unjust action were invoked and relied upon, their foundationlessness obscured and denied by constant repetition and dissemination as clear and essential categories.

What this may also suggest is that the assumption that justice amounts to the reason of the strongest is just as much an ontological claim as the claim that it inheres anywhere else. While Strauss attempts to undermine the notion of justice inhering in particular values or principles, claiming instead that it inheres only in the reason of the strongest, in doing so he performs a similar enactment in claiming to know wherein justice resides. He thus makes an alternative, but no more defensible, ontological claim, which deconstruction can expose and resist. Within such a totalising claim resides a central assumption, namely that even if

\textsuperscript{114} Fritsch, “Derrida’s Democracy to Come,” pp. 577-578.
\textsuperscript{115} Derrida, “Force of Law,” p. 19.
\textsuperscript{116} Derrida, “Force of Law,” p. 28.
\textsuperscript{117} Derrida, “Force of Law,” p. 28.
there is nothing but the voices of singularities and groups espousing accounts and interventions, if the reason of the strongest is understood to relate closely to the dominance of particular groups or individuals in disseminating and perpetuating popular narratives and opinions, this does not necessarily mean that those voices will be self-seeking, dominating and exclusionary in the manner of the Straussian interventions. Strauss simply assumes the reason of the strongest will lead to self-seeking, conflicting and ultimately destructive ends; he excludes the possibility of any space for voices which may resist foreclosure, attend to their own contingency, and operate in light of the abyssal encounter. This is not to say that such voices should be presumed to exist, but rather to leave, as Derrida suggests, a space for the ‘perhaps’, and to expose the politics of a rejection of the perhaps, of the possibility of something other.

Straussianism as Securitisation against the Abyss

The preceding exploration of the Straussian attempt to impose stable categories and assumptions entails that the Straussian project can be read as one of securitisation against the dangers and risks posed by the condition of aporia residing at any and all foundational premises; its reliance upon the friend/enemy binary, its projection of existing democracy as an ideal in opposition to tyrannous regimes, and its conceptualisation of justice as the reason of the strongest betrays a reliance upon totalising ontological points of reference. This securitising tendency comprises both metaphysical and political dimensions, indeed the two are not distinct but rather mutually constitutive and reinforcing; as Dillon notes, “the thought within which political thought occurs – metaphysics – and specifically its conception of truth, is itself a security project, ” concerned with finding “a secure arche, determining principle, beginning or ground...” Such a logic seeks to counter the “abyssal ground of foundation-less freedom” in which decisions must be made. This challenges Minowitz’s claim that Strauss was not ‘political’ because during his period in the US he enacted only five interventions which might be considered such. As Dillon comments

120 Dillon, Politics of Security, p. 78.
121 Minowitz, Straussophobia, p. 279. These five interventions were: “a lecture about the re-education of Germany,” in 1943; “a long letter to the National Review defending Israel,” in 1957; a memo to the Republican CEO of Bell about the USSR in 1961; joining the University Centre for Rational Alternatives, a group which ‘opposed the ‘academic disruption and violence’ associated with the student revolts of the 1960s; signing a “New York Times ad that endorsed Nixon over McGovern in 1972.”
Metaphysics... becomes material in politics of security because metaphysically
determined being has a foundational requirement to secure security... [T]he fate of
metaphysics and the fate of that politics of security are... inextricably intertwined.\textsuperscript{122}

Zehfuss posits that 9/11 prompted “a strong desire to overturn” the inevitability of
vulnerability, and prompted the West “to search even more aggressively for an elusive
security.”\textsuperscript{123} Such a will to secure works to discipline the unknown and unforeseeable:
“securitization as a discursive practice works by synchronising security, safety and
certitude.”\textsuperscript{124} The Straussian interventions can, I would argue, be read as conforming to and
mobilising the tradition of securitisation in the post-9/11 world; they attempt to render clear
the threat faced, the courses of action to be taken, the good. As Dillon notes,

security is a package which tells you what you are as it tells you what to die for; which
tells you what to love as it tells you what to defend (\textit{dulce et decorum est pro patria
mori}); and which tells you what is right as it tells you what is wrong. Its cognates
consequently include individual and collective identity, evil, goodness and justice.\textsuperscript{125}

The Straussian imposition of conceptualisations of the friend/enemy binary, democracy as
existing in opposition to tyranny, and justice as the reason of the strongest conform to
precisely this logic.

Like identity, democracy, and justice, however, the notion of security is also
predicated upon aporetic conditions. While “it is taken to be the very ground of things itself,
that unquestionable thing,”\textsuperscript{126} it too warrants questioning. Dillon notes that “the will to
security... is not only a prime incitement to violence in the Western tradition of thought... but
also self-defeating.”\textsuperscript{127} It is self-defeating because it “does not disclose a stable ground, for
there is none, but betrays instead its own essence as an insistent demand for such a
foundation.”\textsuperscript{128} Like the relationship between friend and enemy, security can “only be
thought by incorporating the trace of insecurity... in the very articulation of security itself...
In short, security and insecurity are unequally codetermining.”\textsuperscript{129} Consequently, is important
to consider, as Campbell explains, “security’s and identity’s contamination by and
indebtedness to otherness.”\textsuperscript{130} As Edkins and Zehfuss note, we “can forget our common
vulnerability in the search for an illusion of security.”\textsuperscript{131}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\item Dillon, \textit{Politics of Security}, p. 27.
\item Zehfuss, “Forget 9/11,” p. 516.
\item Dillon, \textit{Politics of Security}, p. 33.
\item Dillon, \textit{Politics of Security}, p. 28.
\item Dillon, \textit{Politics of Security}, p. 25.
\item Dillon, \textit{Politics of Security}, p. 78.
\item Dillon, \textit{Politics of Security}, p. 127.
\item David Campbell, “Why Fight: Humanitarianism, Principles, and Post-structuralism, \textit{Millennium}, Vol. 27
\item Edkins and Zehfuss, “Generalising the International,” p. 471.
\end{thebibliography}
As well as an indebtedness to otherness, the ways in which security commands a response is significant here. As Dillon shows, “any discourse of security must always already, simultaneously and in plural ways, be a discourse of danger too.”\textsuperscript{132} There is, then, always already residing within a securitising logic a sense of danger and fear: “because security is engendered by fear... it must also teach us what to fear when the secure is being pursued.”\textsuperscript{133} Such a fear underpinning security calls for a response, a shoring up against the danger presented; as Dillon notes,

because security is engendered by fear it also calls for counter-measures to deal with the danger which initiates fear, and for the neutralisation, elimination or constraint of that person, group, object or condition which engenders fear. Hence, while it teaches us what we are threatened by, it also seeks in its turn to proscribe, sanction, punish, overcome – this is to say endanger – that which it says threatens us.\textsuperscript{134}

It thus calls for interventions to counter the danger faced, of which the Straussian interventions would be a good example.

Such an impulse of securitisation permeating the Straussian logic and interventions is closely linked to the politico-philosophical project of modernity: “Security... saturates the language of modern politics. Our political vocabularies reek of it and our political imagination is confined by it.”\textsuperscript{135} For Dillon, security resides at the heart of modernity; in his words, “security thereby became the value which modern understandings of the political and modern practices of politics have come to put beyond question...”\textsuperscript{136} As Chapter One explored, Machiavelli was deemed the founder of modernity for Strauss. Dillon appears to concur, noting that “Machiavelli inaugurates the modern understanding of politics in general...” For Strauss, Machiavelli broke with the ancients by exposing the aporetic condition of man. Here again, Dillon appears to concur, emphasising the “intense aporia which also defines” the Machiavellian moment.\textsuperscript{137} Given this aporia and the destabilising effect is has on all possible foundations, “all that remains of the great project of Western philosophy, then, is the continuing, increasingly violent, insistence upon the need to secure security.”\textsuperscript{138} In other words, the undermining of all essential ontological foundations has resulted in only the will to secure being left. This would seem to relate closely to the Straussian logic; Straus’s response to the condition of aporia is to mobilise opinion masquerading as truth in order to defend against the risks and dangers associated with the abyssal encounter. Burke challenges this sentiment, stating that the “answer is not to seek to

\textsuperscript{132}Dillon, \textit{Politics of Security}, pp. 120-121.
\textsuperscript{133}Dillon, \textit{Politics of Security}, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{134}Dillon, \textit{Politics of Security}, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{135}Dillon, \textit{Politics of Security}, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{137}Dillon, “Lethal Freedom.”
close down these aporias; they call to us and their existence presents an important political opening. Rather than seek to resecure security... we need to challenge security.”

Dillon suggests that we should resist “those fundamental desires and fears which confine the imagination and breed the cruelties upon which it relies in order to deflect whatever appears to threaten or disturb its various drives for metaphysical security.”

Such resistance entails significant risks. As Derrida notes, justice as he conceives of it is an “experience of absolute risk.” This risk is intimately connected to the making of the undecidable decision explored in the previous chapter. The risk inhere in the possibility that the decision made will lead to undesirable outcomes, whether foreseen or otherwise. In other words, there is a substantial risk inhere in the condition of aporia because “once a transcendental guarantee has been dissipated, the possibility of totalitarianism cannot be denied.” As both Strauss and those in the deconstructive tradition attest, Heidegger exemplifies this risk; when Heidegger “chose his own radical politics he chose disastrously.” This highlights the risk of the decision made in conditions of aporia; choosing ‘disastrously’ cannot be precluded. In Campbell’s words, “the wartime writings of Paul de Man, and various attempts at Holocaust revisionism, along with Heidegger’s own Nazi affiliations” may be taken as “proof of the dangers that post-metaphysical thinking portends.” Charges of the dangers associated with such thinking extend to the work of Derrida. As Critchley notes, “Rorty believes if Derrida’s work were extended into the public realm, then this would produce either useless, pernicious or possibly even dangerous ethical and political consequences.”

There is then, a serious risk involved with the aporetic condition of undecidability. As Hagglund explains, “every decision is haunted by the undecidable coming of time, which opens the risk that one has made or will make unjust decisions.”

As has been shown, the Straussian response to this risk is to enact a series of securitising interventions, imposing opinion masquerading as truth and relying upon indefensible and violent ontological presuppositions. The Derridean account challenges these interventions by resisting the foreclosure that resides at their core. Accordingly, the risks associated with the undecidable decision must be taken, even though totalisation cannot finally be defended against because, without such an aporetic encounter, we are

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140 Dillon, “Another Justice,” p. 159.
141 Derrida, “Justice, Colonisation, Translation,” p. 83
142 Campbell, National Deconstruction, p. 203.
143 Dillon, Politics of Security, p. 42.
already within a totalising schema. In Hugglund’s terms, “to deny this inevitable risk, to deny the essential corruptibility of responsibility or to project its consummation in an ideal future, is to deny the condition that makes responsibility possible in the first place.”¹⁴⁷ “To deny the danger,” in Dillon’s words, is to deny “the question of the political.”¹⁴⁸ As Derrida puts it, “if one does not take such risks, then one does nothing, and nothing happens... [W]ithout risk, there is nothing.”¹⁴⁹ This is because, as Zehfuss notes, there “is clearly no politics without risk. Put differently, without the risk of the future there could be no decision.”¹⁵⁰ As Hagglund reiterates: “Without such risk, there would be no question of justice in the first place, since the execution of law would be nothing but a faultless application of rules.”¹⁵¹ This lack of structuring criteria is painful according to Derrida; as Cornell echoes, “this kind of undecidability is truly frightening.”¹⁵² As Bulley comments of justice, “like the future, one can say it can only be ‘anticipated in the form of an absolute danger’.¹⁵³ The risk associated with such a danger must be taken, I would submit, for at least two reasons, firstly, because the attempt to defend against it, as was shown in the case of democracy, entails an autoimmune self-destruction, and secondly, because a failure to do so defaults on attempting to take responsibility for the violence of one’s own position and life.

Deconstruction and/as resistance cannot guarantee against cycles of violence because we are always already within cycles of violence. In Dillon’s estimation, there “is no possibility of ‘guaranteed effectiveness’... for quelling violence.”¹⁵⁴ What it can do, however, is unsettle the good conscience associated with the possibility of non-violence by exposing the violence always already being committed. It highlights such violence by demonstrating the absence of solid foundations upon which discourses necessarily, as a self-perpetuating logic predicated upon mystical foundations, rest. In short, it can show (some of) the specific and plural dimensions of the aporetic conditions underpinning any and all discourses, and in doing so upset their attempts at conceptual mastery and ontological totalitarianism which engender such violence. It does not undo or redeem violence, and neither does it preclude or silence the discourse, but merely shows its contingency and limitations, thereby pointing towards the taking responsibility for its political as opposed to natural, essential or universal foundations.

¹⁴⁸ Dillon, Politics of Security, p. 131.
¹⁴⁹ Derrida, Negotiations, p. 238.
¹⁵³ Bulley, “Ethical Assassination,” p. 130.
¹⁵⁴ Dillon, Politics of Security, p. 150.
However, if the ontological foreclosure underpinning any and all positions is to be resisted, this enactment of deconstruction cannot end here. Such ontological foreclosure underpins that which one embraces as much as that which one seeks to challenge or reject. Accordingly, if responsibility is to be gestured towards, a deconstruction of that with which one agrees and one’s own commitments must be engaged in. Such a task would be limitless and endless, but suffice it to explore four instances relating firstly to the work of scholars mobilising Derrida’s thought, and secondly the latter itself.
Chapter Six
Challenging Ontological Foreclosure in Derridean Thought

Introduction

While Derrida’s thought can, as the above shows, be read as enacting a destabilisation of metaphysics, ontology, and processes of opinion construction, it may be, or may be inexorably, the case that there are instances wherein such essential or foundational categories and assumptions appear. In order to attempt to take responsibility for the violence inherent to this, the movement of deconstruction and/as resistance must be ceaseless and the temptation to self-exempt struggled against. Accordingly, this final chapter exposes a series of dimensions of Derrida’s thought where such foundational claims may be operating. It examines two instances of this by those mobilising Derrida’s thought, namely the use of the category of the ‘worst’ and the invocation of a Levinasian supplement before turning to the latter’s writings themselves, commenting upon the question of teleology in Derrida’s thought, his use of the Kantian ‘Regulative Idea’, as well as upon the issues of time and openness.

Deconstructing the ‘Worst’

The first instances wherein such a reappearance is in evidence relates to the concept of the ‘worst’. Responsibility for Derrida may be described as being “without end. Here we are concerned with an almost impossible responsibility, without the slightest hint of closure or reprieve.”1 In other words, responsibility extends limitlessly to any and all for Derrida. However, it appears as though this will to resist foreclosure reaches its limit in the face of the ‘worst’, a concept that appears in both “Force of Law” and The Other Heading,2 and that has been mobilised by scholars deploying Derrida’s thought. Bulley, for instance, suggests that

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the worst refers to “atrocities such as genocide, Nazism, xenophobia, ‘ethnic cleansing’.” To these, he continues, we can be closed, we must “oppose or prevent” them because “it is only those events that we think obstruct the future or bring death”, and those close the future to the coming of the other.” 3 In other words, Bulley suggests that in these worst cases we can be closed, we can know them to be the worst, and hence know what the right thing to do is, i.e. be closed to them. This distinction is problematic.

Such discrimination relies on a clear distinction between victim and perpetrator, the committer of the worst and those harmed by it, also upon a presumed ‘we’ in contradistinction to an implied ‘them’. As Dauphinée’s Stojan Sokolvic reminds us, this fails to take account of

the violence the committer of violence has done to himself... trapped as they are in this life and hemmed in on all sides by the measure of their own responsibility... If you heard our wailing – killer and killed alike – you would say something other... you would have held our heads, because we could not stop trembling, even when we were killing, even when we came to be defined by the killing we had done. 4

That this was stated by an individual involved in the Bosnian conflict highlights the problems with referring simply to ‘ethnic cleansing’ as the ‘worst’, which ‘we’ may be legitimately closed and opposed to. The use of the ‘worst’ would seem to impose a limit on responsibility, suggesting that at a certain point a final and clear category delimiting the innocent from the guilty may be relied upon. As Bulley puts it, “we can oppose those others who prevent our openness to other others.” 5 A comparable rationale was in evidence, as Dauphinée notes, in “Levinas’s infamous excision of the Palestinians from the realm of those to whom the Israeli ‘I’ is responsible.” 6

The use of the ‘worst’ risks mobilising a logic of totalising premises; the category delimits in advance something which ‘we’ can legitimately oppose without hesitation which runs counter to the imperative to make the undecidable decision, to judge anew in each case without recourse to given or prior categories which relieve us of the agony of the decision and allow good conscience of having done the right thing. In other words, as Critchley notes, “nothing would be more irresponsible and totalitarian than the attempt a priori to exclude the monstrous or the terrible.” 7 As Derrida puts it,
good conscience as subjective certainty is incompatible with the absolute risk that every promise, every engagement, and every responsible decision – if there are such – must run. To protect the decision or responsibility by knowledge, some theoretical assurance, or by the certainty of being right, of being on the side of science, of consciousness or of reason, is to transform this experience into the deployment of a program, into a technical deployment of a rule or a norm, or into the subsumption of a determined ‘case’.8

The use of the worst may be understood as amounting to precisely such a theoretical assurance through its sanctioning of a closure towards some kinds of others, those who are deemed guilty of or associated with the atrocities it entails. Bulley recognises this when he asks: “whose calculation can we say is perverse, or the worst? Why are we responsible to victims rather than the perpetrators of atrocities if both are equally ‘other’? Who makes this decision and how can it be justified?” In answer to this, he continues: “Derrida says that incalculable justice gives us a duty to calculate,”9 in other words, the imperative to calculate sanctions, Bulley appears to intimate, the use of the category of the ‘worst’. However, that we are required to calculate does not entail that we are entitled to generate totalising categories or groups which always fall outside the demands of responsibility; calculation must, as the above quotation shows, not rely upon a prior norm or determined case but rather be taken without recourse to such things which remove the weight and trauma of the decision; it must move in light of the aporetic condition underpinning it and resist the imposition of totalising premises.

Rather than emphasising the ‘worst’, Derrida’s imperative to calculate can be read as demanding the taking of responsibility for the decision made in all its undecidability, without recourse to clarifying and mitigating notions. Bulley seems to concede this by stating that “every closure is as unjustifiable as any other.” However, he stipulates that “we have to make the decision, we must close in order to avoid the worst.”10 This seems to suggest that the decision must be made in order to avoid the worst, i.e. Nazism, genocide, etc., that the decision is made with consideration in mind. I would argue that such a trajectory or goal runs counter to Derrida’s imperative that responsibility for the decision must be taken without recourse to such a telos, and that such a project represents rather than challenges the logic of ontological totalisation. This is emphatically not to suggest that genocides or Nazism should not be resisted, nor is it to imply that these acts cannot or should not be subject to judgment; deconstruction and/as resistance can powerfully challenge the ontological totalitarianism which underpins political totalitarianism. It is, rather, to challenge the use of the category ‘worst’, which serves to function as a generalisable justification for a position taken.

8 Derrida, Aporias, p. 19.
The problem of totalisation is again reflected in Bulley’s commentary elsewhere of the ‘least bad’. He states: “The ‘least bad’ is not the ‘good’, but the important thing is that it is not the worst; while only a ‘stopgap’ it is necessary that we continue in the interminable search for the least bad conditions.”¹¹ This again appears to smuggle in standards of value which help lay a path across the undecidable aporia. It fails to contend sufficiently with the problem that it is not a case of arranging alternative projects in order to avoid that which is deemed undesirable or ‘worst’ but rather to confront the indefensible violence of any position or decision. It also risks imposing a teleology or trajectory; the notion of a ‘stopgap’ connotes a temporary measure to be resolved more permanently at some later point. I would suggest that the constant struggle to resist the imposition of such categories marks a gesture towards responsibility. Hierarchising the various choices as less bad, good, or worst fails to address this violence and risks an abdication of responsibility by justifying some choices over others in advance, legitimating some and rejecting others. While this is emphatically not to say that it does not matter what is chosen, it is to claim that violence inheres in any choice and this should not be offset through the mobilisation of such categories.

This is illustrated in Bulley’s own example of the fictional President Bartlet’s dilemma, in which the latter must decide whether or not to assassinate a terrorist in order to save the lives of his victims. If the categories of the ‘worst’ or ‘lesser violence’ may be relied upon, his decision to assassinate his adversary is made for him, and he may rest assured in good conscience that he acted correctly by opposing the worst. Thus Bulley’s comment that we “have a duty to guard against the coming of such a theory or idea”¹² implies that ‘we’ should guard against certain politico-philosophical programs, missing the point that the use of such a category ‘worst’ itself entails the violence of ontological totalisation. This furthermore fails to note that not just these ‘worst’ phenomena but rather all politico-philosophical projects entail the violence of ontological totalisation so should be subject to deconstruction as a mode of resistance; positing the ‘worst’ reaffirms the logic of metaphysics by not considering that it is not these alone but rather any and all projects that entail violent totalisation. The logic of such totalisation is thus not challenged by mobilising the category ‘worst’ but is, rather, reinforced. In contrast, by subjecting any and all projects, both those deemed monstrous and those most dearly affirmed, to deconstruction, such totalisation may be resisted. This does not preclude the holding of a position; a position is always already being held and performed whether or not consciously so. Rather, this entails an endless and restless taking of responsibility for the position taken without recourse to legitimating and totalising categories.

The Closure of a Levinasian Supplement

A further instance of such foreclosure relates to the question of the necessity of a Levinasian supplement to render Derrida’s thought more explicitly politically poignant. Critchley, for instance, has argued that “there is an impasse of the political in Derrida’s work” which may be countered “by returning to Levinas.” This is necessary, according to Critchley, because deconstruction is unable to traverse “the passage from undecidability to the decision, from responsibility to questioning, from deconstruction to critique, from ethics to politics.” Critchley’s supplementing of Derrida with Levinas is concerned at root, he claims, with the political: “At stake... is the question of politics, or politics conceived as a space of questioning.” What he means by this is a shift from ethics to the political; in his terms returning to the ‘question’ of politics from the order of the ‘question of the question’ of ethics. Critchley thus appears to want to enact a shift from the realm of the question of the question, i.e. the space of ethics, to the realm of the question of politics, i.e. the sphere of action, decision, practice, or at least to navigate between the two. There are several interrelated problems with this.

Firstly, such an account posits a preontological ethical relation. For Levinas, the ‘other’ disrupts “the eternal and irreversible return of the identical to itself,” and “the intangible nature of its logical and ontological privilege.” In other words, the ‘ideal priority’ of being is suspended, and in its place ethics emerges as ‘first philosophy’, i.e. as a prior or originary relation, preceding, indeed making possible, ‘being’. However, it is not clear how such ontological priority may be claimed. This appears to be supported in Laclau’s statement that

decomposition has important consequences for both ethics and politics. These consequences, however, depend on deconstruction’s ability to go down to the bottom of its own radicalism and avoid becoming entangled in all the problems of a Levinasian ethics (whose proclaimed aim, to present ethics as first philosophy, should from the start look suspicious to any deconstructionist).

The suggestion here appears to be that the deconstruction’s political and ethical purchase can only be realised if its own radicalism is attended to, i.e. its capacity to disrupt and resist is at play and not undermined by the imposition of ontological claims such as the priority of ethics qua Levinas.

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14 Critchley, The Ethics of Deconstruction, p. 237
15 Critchley, The Ethics of Deconstruction, p. 220.
A further problem with this formulation is the attempt to separate an ‘ethical’ encounter between two from the ‘political’ encounter wherein a third, and infinite thirds, are present. As Hagglund explains, “the very idea of a primary ‘ethical experience’ in the face-to-face encounter is untenable, since any encounter always excludes others and thus exercises discrimination.” Put differently, this suggests that there is always already a violence to any encounter which precludes the primacy or independence of an ethical relation; the pure ethical relation of two can never be as the third is always already present. Thus there can be no good conscience or inherently ethical response: one can choose “between betrayal and betrayal, always more than one betrayal.”

Such an account posits a particular conceptualisation of the space of the political. For Critchley,

the political space is based on the irreducibility of ethical transcendence, where the community takes on meaning in difference without reducing difference. Political space is an open, plural, opaque network of ethical relations which are non-totalizable... Levinasian politics is the enactment of plurality, of multiplicity. Whether one agrees or not with this account of the political is not the issue; as this thesis has shown, there are no grounds upon which to base a preference for any particular premises or conceptualisations. What is noteworthy here is the presence of word ‘is’ in each of the three sentences. For Levinas politics ‘is’; it is based on the irreducibility of ethical transcendence, open, plural, the enactment of plurality and multiplicity. What this account results in, then, is a reaffirmation of precisely the imposition of ontological categories and assumptions it seeks to challenge. In Hagglund’s estimation, “the Levinasian argument that Critchley adopts is a clear example of the metaphysical logic Derrida deconstructs.” By simply changing the ‘content’ of politics from being predicated upon ‘Being’ qua Heidegger to ethics as first philosophy, Levinas fails to address the violence immanent to any and all ontological imposition; this inversion leaves the logic of metaphysical totalisation firmly intact.

Critchley thus appears to be seeking a path or guide through the aporia, a sense of trajectory towards a space of resolution or safety, a guiding force i.e. the ontological priority of ethics qua Levinas in order to show how to make the undecidable decision. Deconstruction does not provide such an alibi; rather, it resists the will to securitize in this manner, refusing to obscure or offset the abyssal encounter within the condition of undecidability, forcing the subject to shoulder the burden alone without recourse to any justificatory premise or tradition. It draws attention to the problem that such a traversal from the aporetic condition

19 Derrida, _Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas_, p. 34.
20 Critchley, _The Ethics of Deconstruction_, p. 225.
of undecidability to the making of the decision is necessarily indefensible; that it cannot ‘help’ lay a path between the abyss and the position taken is not a consequence of some failure or ineptitude on its part but rather is a function of the work of deconstruction in showing the violence and unjustifiability of any and all such mediations. It consequently challenges the condition of possibility of both ethics and politics, and in doing so forces the taking of responsibility; it cannot help us navigate the condition of undecidability in terms of showing us how to arrive at a decision or what factors to consider, but rather exposes the violence immanent to any and all decisions made under aporetic conditions. As Hagglund notes, “there is no opposition between undecidability and decisions in Derrida’s thinking. On the contrary, it is because the future cannot be decided in advance that one has to make decisions.”

In other words, the aporetic condition does not preclude the taking of the decision but rather entails its necessity. That no clear path is available in advance to traverse the abyss between undecidability and the decision does not render the latter impossible but is rather its condition of possibility. Developing tools or stratagems by which to navigate this more securely would amount to a return to the logic of totalisation through the negation of the condition of aporia. In Laclau’s estimation, the “role of deconstruction is... to reactiv[e] the moment of decision that underlies any sedimented set of social relations.”

Critchley’s account leaves intact the ‘is’ of politics, its ontology. I would suggest that deconstruction allows us to resist this, thereby offering continuous reconceptualisations of the political which challenge any particular ‘is’, whether the Schmittean friend/enemy binary as its condition of possibility or the Levinasian notion of ethics as first philosophy, the latter amounting to a challenge which alters the content but leaves the metaphysical/ontological form of the political intact by offering an alternative but failing to problematise the possibility/status/totalising implications of any and all conceptualisation or alternative political ‘is’. In other words, the totalising potential of both that which one may (or may not) feel indignant towards (Schmitt) and that with which one may (or may not) have sympathy for (Levinas) should be resisted through deconstruction, challenging the notion that political consists in either the friend/enemy or the primacy of ethics or indeed any other foundational or ontological ‘is’. Because there can be no grounds upon which to prefer any particular conceptualisation or account, i.e. no possibility of the ‘correctness’ of these configurations, all that remains is the attempt to take responsibility for the violence enacted by any and all of them and a will to resist the imposition of any and all of them.

The philosophical projects of both Strauss and Levinas were closely related to the question of the Holocaust. Both sought to intervene to counter the possibility of this kind of

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totalitarianism, Levinas by making ethics ontologically prior, and Strauss by securing against the implications of the destabilisation of value which leaves space for accession of totalitarianism. For Levinas, Nazism was an ‘elemental evil’, while for Strauss it was a consequence of the destabilisation of the categories of good and evil because relativism allows for the accession of anything through the reason of the strongest. In contrast to these positions, what deconstruction can do is take account of the abyss by restlessly challenge the imposition of any and all orders thereby offsetting the possibility of totalitarianism in all its forms. What both Strauss and Levinas miss is that the ‘is’ of their positions means that they both perpetuate that which they seek to prevent, Levinas by leaving intact the concept of a preontological ethics as first philosophy, and Strauss by imposing totalising opinions and creating the semblance of ontology. Both may see the problem of ontology as the foundation of political totalitarianism, but both reaffirm and reinforce the logic of precisely this.

The question remaining may be, then, not how to rehabilitate ethics but rather how to contend with the aporetic condition of the ethical wherein nothing in and of itself can be deemed ethical. This is not to say that actions and outcomes are meaningless and have no effect but rather that returning to thinking ‘ethics’, even in a Levinasian sense, undermines condition of undecidability wherein responsibility for the always already unethical and violent decision must be made. In other words, pursuing ‘ethics’ however defined seems to obscure the project I would suggest is essential here: attempting to take account of and responsibility for the violence which inheres in any and all decisions, programs, systems and schemas. Attempting to do the ‘right’ thing must, then, be understood to be impossible. Taking responsibility for always already having enacted a violent thing as no ‘right’ thing exists is all that remains and is what may be approached through restless and endless resistance through deconstruction.

Critchley claims that “in order for there to be a future for deconstruction, it has been necessary to engage in the writing of this [ethical] supplement.”24 This appears to suggest that deconstruction must be modified in order to ensure a place in the exiting order; it must be made to conform to and address the needs and demands of such an existing order. This, however, fails to take account firstly that deconstruction ‘is’ not, is nothing in particular, but rather responds and resists the demands of any and all orders, and secondly that by attempting to discipline and orient deconstruction as relevant to the present order, it removes its purchase and significance. Critchley’s concern for deconstruction’s future purchase suggests a teleological view of some expected future context, as though deconstruction’s ethico-political purchase depends upon its being made relevant to or set to work in ways conducive to such a presumed future context. However, deconstruction does

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not fit into future or present orders, and its significance is not predicated upon its becoming more applicable to any presumed future but rather resists and unsettles any and all orders and futures. Its relevance depends not on being made to correspond to the needs of any particular order to ensure its relevance but rather, on occuring within and alongside any and all orders, exposing their mystical foundations and the violence of their founding, resisting the imposition of totalising discourses, in short demonstrating their contingency and indefensibility.

**Teleology and the Regulative Idea**

To turn to the thought of Derrida itself, there are several ways in which teleological or totalising categories may be seen, in spite of having so powerfully problematised by Derrida. This may firstly be posed in light of his use of the notion of ‘perfectibility’, in particular in relation to democracy and laws. In the context of the laws he claims, “we can change them, we improve them, we want to improve them.” Similarly, he states:

> we have to change the law, improve the law, and there is an infinite progress to be performed, to be achieved in that respect. I love the process of perfectibility, because it is marked by the context of the eighteenth century, the Aufklärung. It is often the case that people would like to oppose this period of deconstruction to the Enlightenment. No, I am for the Enlightenment, I’m for progress, I’m a ‘progressivist’. I think the law is perfectible and we can improve the law.

This characterisation of the changing and adaptation of laws and right as ‘perfectible’ and ‘improvement’ may be said to have an air of teleology about it. That rights for women and workers have been introduced, and that many people may welcome this, does not mean that this can be unproblematically deemed objectively or essentially better, improved, or working towards some ideal condition. The term ‘improved’ here seems to suggest some given standard by which to judge whether a change is ‘good’ or ‘bad’; one cannot improve something without a spectrum of better and worse against which it can be judged. Similarly, the idea that deconstruction means improvement is also worthy of question; that deconstruction entails modification responsive to changing ideas and attitudes seems clear, yet that this process can be deemed an enhancement or move towards a goal is less so. The difference here may be put as while deconstruction certainly entails process, it cannot

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definitely claim progress, accession towards something better. It is important to distinguish, then, between the implication that deconstruction aims towards some ideal, and is in this sense improving or perfecting that which it challenges, and the more limited claim that it engenders movements within a contextually specific locale, being responsive to the changes therein but without claiming perfectibility or improvement per se; it may be that this distinction is not always clear in Derrida’s texts.

A similar problem may be discerned with the notion of the ‘to come’. While Derrida characterises this as a never-present future promise, it may be argued that it operates in a somewhat essentialising or regulatory fashion. This is alluded to in Patton’s comment that the to come “does not refer to a future that will one day become present but to a structural future that will never be actualised in any present.”27 The notion that a structural future may be presumed and referred to must be deemed problematic, in the sense that it implies a teleology, that an essential or foundational structure exists as regards the future. This goes against Derrida’s assertion that the future must of necessity remain unknown and that openness to it, whatever it may turn out to be, is the only means by which the abyss may be attended to; if it can be deemed to have a structure, all this is lost.

Concurrently, the distinction between the ‘unconditional’ and ‘conditional’ may be problematic in a similar manner. By this is meant that while the ‘conditional’, whether democracy, justice, or anything else appear to reflect the contingency of these notions, i.e. their ultimate foundationlessness, Derrida’s use of the ‘unconditional’ alludes, perhaps, to something that exists beyond our experience or knowledge of it. Accordingly, it may be asked how it is possible for him to be sure such a guiding principle exists, that conditional democracy or justice is fashioned in light of a move towards this unconditional and unknowable because non-being present thing. It may be suggested that this ‘to come’ entails a type of faith, or guiding principle, not unlike Adam Smith’s ‘invisible hand’ which guides capitalism, by or towards which existing democracy or justice is somehow oriented. That the constituted subject has no vantage point but his/her own culturally specific locale would seem to render it difficult for such a claim to the existence, even if non-realisable existence, of an abstract absolute democracy or justice. It also begs the question of, given their problematic nature, why Derrida insists on such guiding premises; if deconstruction can and does occur within the realm of the conditional, challenging and disrupting the conditional, why is it necessary for it to do this in the direction of an absolute or unconditional premise? To avoid the teleological implications that Derrida is so aware of in traditional political thought, the operation of deconstruction within and through the conditional realm could, perhaps, operate just as well without recourse to anything outside of this, or anything which

pertains to improvement, perfectibility or progress; its process, its unending unsettling of the conditional could be enough and indeed would be more in keeping with the abyssal encounter. This relates also to the question of the ‘worst’ raised above; the removal of this would not impede the resistance of deconstruction; on the contrary, its inclusion seems to do so.

The question of faith here also warrants mention, specifically in terms of the question of the messianic. While Derrida is clear that he intends the notion to function without the promise of a known or anticipated arrivant, a messiah, his use of the term cannot be entirely dissociated from this heritage. Thomas cites Derrida as claiming that he will never be ready to renounce “a certain emancipatory and messianic affirmation, a certain experience of the promise that one can try to liberate from any dogmatics and even from any metaphysico-religious determination, from any messianism.” This demonstrates Derrida’s intention to empty out the onto-theological dimensions of the messianic, but whether or not he succeeds finally in this may not be certain. Indeed, it may be justifiable to suggest that this amounts to a substitution of an explicitly non-secular messianism for a secular movement which nevertheless functions in precisely the same manner. This poses the question of whether the attempt to liberate messianism from religious dogma may not be enough to ensure that it is not rendered indistinguishable from a messianism with the promise of a messiah. In other words, in a similar manner to the performance of strategic essentialism amounting simply to essentialism given its status as a performative endeavour, it may be suggested that messianicity without the messiah leans towards the reassurance of the promise of the resolution brought by the expected and known arrivant.

Of particular significance here is Derrida’s commentary relating to the Kantian ‘regulative idea’. The concept of the ‘to come’, the messianic promise, has been characterised by certain commentators as closely resembling the regulative idea. For instance, Giovanna Borradori states to Derrida that his notion of justice to come “sounds like a regulative idea, though I know you do not like this expression...” In “Force of Law” Derrida broaches exactly this question, stating:

I would hesitate to assimilate too quickly this ‘idea of justice’ to a regulative idea in the Kantian sense), to a messianic promise or to other horizons of the same type... One of the reasons I’m keeping such a distance from all these horizons – from the Kantian regulative idea or from the messianic advent... is that they are, precisely, horizons..."
Similarly, Derrida insists that “to the regulative Idea in the Kantian sense... I would not want the idea of a democracy to come to be reduced.”\textsuperscript{31} The problem with such a notion is, as Beardsworth notes,

> the content of this Idea necessarily finds form in the ‘form of universality’. This form also reduces ethical orientation to an easily rehearsed programme of judgement. By making the principle of ethics universality, Kant banishes, in the name of ethics, the risk of ethical judgement... the very condition of ethical orientation.\textsuperscript{32}

This means, he continues, that in “the very name of less violence (the regulative Idea of freedom as a horizon to time and space), Kant ends up being violent by refusing a necessary relation between law and violence.”\textsuperscript{33} This suggests that the mobilisation of the regulative idea imposes a universalising foreclosure which removes the condition of possibility of taking the undecidable decision and thereby gesturing towards the taking of responsibility for the decision; recourse to a known, stable universal principle necessarily defaults on responsibility.

However, it may be that such a reliance is at work in Derrida's thought. He states: “the regulative idea remains, for lack of anything better... a last resort. Although such a last resort or final recourse risks becoming an alibi, it retains a certain dignity.”\textsuperscript{34} This suggests that Derrida saw some purchase to the regulative idea. Significantly, however, Derrida phrases his possible mobilisation of the concept as a temptation or slip; he states: “I cannot swear that I will not one day give in to it.”\textsuperscript{35} This appears to suggest that he feels himself tempted to resort, as a last resort, to this concept. This sentiment is echoed elsewhere:

> For lack of anything better, if we can say this about a regulative idea, the regulative idea remains perhaps an ultimate reservation. Though such a last recourse risks becoming an alibi, it retains a certain dignity. I cannot swear that I will not one day give into it.\textsuperscript{36}

This statement demonstrates the will to resist which, I have argued, resides at the core of the deconstructive project, but also, crucially, that Derrida felt himself at risk of ‘giving in’ to the security offered by a concept like the regulative idea. That Derrida appears to have felt, towards the end of his life, unsure as to whether he would not slip into the use of such an alibi demonstrates the profundity of this struggle. This may be said to amount to a recognition of the possibility of a slip from the deconstructive resistance his thought enacts through the utilisation of the notion of the regulative idea.

\textsuperscript{31} Derrida, \textit{Rogues}, p. 83.
\textsuperscript{32} Beardsworth, \textit{Derrida & the Political}, p. 64.
\textsuperscript{33} Beardsworth, \textit{Derrida & the Political}, p. 69.
\textsuperscript{34} Derrida, \textit{Rogues}, p. 83.
\textsuperscript{35} Derrida, \textit{Rogues}, p. 83.
\textsuperscript{36} Derrida, “Autoimmunity,” pp. 133-134.
Time and the Political

Derrida’s apparent concern with his own slip towards employing the regulative idea appears to be considerably more in evidence in his later writings. This point is illustrated in his changing commentary on Europe. In *The Other Heading* he states:

> Europe is... a geographical head-land or heading that has always given itself the representation or figure of a spiritual heading, at once as project, task, or infinite – that is to say universal – idea, as the memory of itself that gathers and accumulates itself, capitalizes upon itself, in and for itself. Europe has also confused its image, its face, its figure, its taking-place, with that of an advanced point, the point of phallus if you will, and thus, once again, with a heading for world civilization or human culture in general.\(^{37}\)

In this identity-conception, Europe “claims to justify itself in the name of a privilege in responsibility and in the memory of the universal and... finally, of the transcendental or ontological.”\(^{38}\) Derrida continues:

> Europe takes itself to be a promontory, an advance – the avant-garde of geography and history. It advances and promotes itself as an advance, and it will never have ceased to make advances on the other: to induce, seduce, produce, and conduce, to spread out, to cultivate, to love or violate, to colonize, and to colonise itself.\(^ {39}\)

Such a deconstructive challenge to the concept ‘Europe’ appears to dwindle roughly ten years later. Derrida comments:

> I persist in using this name ‘Europe’, even in quotation marks, because... [of] the experience Europe inaugurated at the time of the Enlightenment... in the relationship between the political and the theological or, rather, the religious... will have left in European political space absolutely original marks with regard to... the authority of religious doctrine over the political.\(^{40}\)

Cheah understands by this that for Derrida, Europe “has a privileged, ‘irreplaceable’ task in the extension of worldwide democracy to come after September 11 because of the Enlightenment’s indispensible experience of the need to be cautious of the power of religious doctrine in the political realm.”\(^{41}\) This suggests a reliance of Derrida on the experience in Europe of the Enlightenment, and signals for him that this legacy privileges Europe due to the consequent knowledge it developed that the political must not be dictated by religious doctrine. Such a privileging may go some way to accounting for Derrida’s statement that “as long as Europe does not have a unified military force sufficient for autonomous


\(^{38}\) Derrida, *The Other Heading*, p. 47.

\(^{39}\) Derrida, *The Other Heading*, p. 49.


interventions, interventions that would be motivated, calculated, discussed, and deliberated in Europe, the fundamental premises of the current situation will not change [US hegemony].”

He elaborates elsewhere:

I am tempted to think that it [Europe] needs a military force and a foreign policy capable of supporting a transformed United Nations, one headquartered in Europe and equipped with the means to implement its resolutions without having to yield to the interests or unilateral opportunism of the techno-economic-military power of the United States.

This demonstrates a fundamental shift, or a temptation to shift, in Derrida’s thought relating to Europe, from one of problematisation and resistance to the violences it imposes, to a reliance upon its symbolic and practical applications.

Such a transition appears to be related to the question of aporia. This is demonstrated by contrasting two statements made by Beardsworth, again roughly ten years apart. He states that the tension between violence and law “is not to be resolved. It has to be thought aporetically. Hence, in the clearest terms possible, the political weight of Derrida’s use of aporia.” Roughly ten years later, his position appears to have altered considerably:

the aporias of democracy and sovereignty... should be left to one side as one builds institutions that will allow for the difference of the world in the first place. It will be for the next generations to work with the necessary exclusions that accompany any determination of the real.

Such a shift marks, I would submit, a slip from resistance to the imposition of ontology on the parts of both Derrida and Beardsworth here. This transition may have been the result of many influences, including the changing political circumstances, a recognition of the limitations of maintaining a deconstructive position, and the possibility of maintaining such a struggle indefinitely. It poses the question of whether sustaining such a deconstructive orientation is possible, psychologically and emotionally; while this is certainly unclear, what I suggest is that this is the only means by which it may be possible to gesture towards the taking of responsibility for the violent foreclosure one is always already enacting.

44 Beardsworth, Derrida & the Political, p. 69.
45 Richard Beardsworth, “The Future of Critical Philosophy and World Politics,” Millennium, Vol. 32 (2005), p. 224. I am not implying that Derrida’s thought is responsible for Beardsworth’s shift but rather that a parallel may be drawn between the two as regards this shift from resisting ontology to appearing to do so to a lesser extent.
Openness

This theme of foreclosure is central to Derrida’s thought, and is frequently dealt with in conjunction with the concept of ‘openness’. As Fritsch notes, Derrida argues “that openness to the future is the condition of possibility of the event, of identity, or decision, responsibility, hospitality, and in general the relation to the other...”46 Similarly, in Mustapha Cherif’s terms, “speech has to be addressed to the other, as Professor Jacques Derrida told us, and that depends on each of us, on our commitment to always prefer the Open.”47 This may be understood, according to Derrida, as “the exposure (the desire, the openness, but also the fear) that opens, that opens itself, that opens us to time, to what comes upon us, to what arrives or happens, to the event.”48 The question of openness relates closely to the notion of risk: in Derrida’s words, “the difference between an opening up and a closure depends on the risk taken, on the responsibility taken in the midst of risk.”49 This suggests that for Derrida the taking of the risk of openness, to the other, to the future, to whatever may arrive resides at the heart of Derrida’s thought.

The notion of openness, however, may be problematic in at least two ways. Firstly, the concept of openness may suggest a passivity, a calm or quiet condition wherein we may simply sit and wait for the arrival or event. I would submit that this site is, rather, one of constant struggle and intervention, and consequently prefer the notion of resistance to foreclosure in this context. The latter draws attention to the effort required and precariousness of the attempt to constantly resist the will to foreclose and securitize. It suggests an ongoing struggle against acquiescence, whether explicitly or tacitly, to the instalment of boundaries and categories predicated upon salutary opinions, legitimating fictions, or mystical foundations. It is above all an appeal to engage in an active and endless deconstruction of anything which relies upon and attempts to obscure the aporetic or abyssal void residing at the heart of any configuration or schema of names, categories, opinions, laws, norms, rules, or values. It can, then, be viewed as mounting an extensive challenge to the logic and practices at work in the Straussian persuasion; as has been shown the latter relies on precisely these, which may be both the most interesting and most saddening part, in full knowledge of their groundlessness and foundationlessness.

Secondly, in Fritsch’s terms, “Derrida moves from the structural impossibility of closure (‘cannot be prevented’) to the normative claim that such closure ought not be

47 Cherif, Islam and the West, p. 87.
48 Derrida, “Autoimmunity,” p. 120.
49 Derrida in Cherif, Islam and the West, p. 60.
Laclau similarly asks whether, “from the impossibility of a presence closed in itself, from an ‘ontological’ condition in which openness to the event, to the heterogeneous, to the radically other... some kind of ethical injunction to be responsible and to keep oneself open to the heterogeneity of the other necessarily follows.” In other words, he continues, “from the fact that there is the impossibility of ultimate closure and presence, it does not follow that there is an ethical imperative to ‘cultivate’ that openness...” While such an ethical imperative cannot be defended in terms of moving towards a lesser violence or the good, I suggest that approaching the question from one of resistance to the foreclosure that ontology entails may be helpful here. What this means is that while openness cannot be deemed in itself good or defended as a ethical imperative, the will to resist the ontological foreclosure, to restlessly unsettle any and all claims to ethicality or ontology challenges this without positing a ‘more ethical’ orientation such as openness. The resistance of deconstruction challenges any and all dispositions and states of being, from the Straussian project of foreclose via the generation of opinion, to a Levinasian commitment to the priority of ethics or openness, and also, crucially, the positions and decisions taken as a consequence of its own operation. In other words, unlike a constitutive ‘openness’, deconstruction as resistance undermines any position taken without precluding, indeed while recognising as already having happened, the taking of the decision and position. In other words, rather than positing a temperament of condition that we should be, e.g. open, deconstruction perpetually disturbs any and all such orientations and assumptions, exposing the violence of any and all, and resisting an arrival and stasis of any and all, while not precluding the taking of the decision or position, indeed exposing the impossibility of non-violence, of not taking a position.

This may be phrased in terms of a constant negotiation in the sense set out by Bulley and others. In Derrida’s terms,

I prefer the word ‘negotiation’ to more noble words... [T]here is always something about negotiation that is a little dirty, that gets one’s hands dirty. Once one negotiates, something is being trafficked, something of the order of a traffic, or the relations of force.... I prefer the word ‘negotiation’ because it does not disguise the anxiety, about which I am speaking, with nobility. As a result, it seems more mediocre; one thinks of force, one thinks of compromise, one thinks of impure things. Negotiation is impure.52

This passage emphasises the relations of force which inhere in the taking of any position through a process of mediation or negotiation. It thus marks the violence immanent to such processes and dispels any legitimating sense of nobility or good conscience.

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52 Derrida, Negotiations, pp. 13-14.
The central distinguishing feature that remains, however, between the Derridean moment and the Straussian is the former’s self-location within the struggle of resisting the pull of ontology. While Strauss, and indeed Schmitt and Levinas, posits ideas of the ‘is’, Derrida commits himself to an endless project of resistance. That such a struggle is endless and without the possibility of resolution, as resolution would slip back into the logic of totalisation, is both frightening and painful. In Derrida’s words, “this hypothesis in the form of a question[,] would be enough to give one vertigo. It would make one tremble, it could also paralyze one at the edge of the abyss...”\(^{53}\) He comments elsewhere on “the ‘sufferance’ of deconstruction”, by which he means “what makes it suffer and what makes those it torments suffer, is perhaps the absence of rules, of norms, and definitive criteria...”\(^{54}\) Such struggle may, however, be a vital part of attempting to resist and take responsibility for the violence of ontology.

\(^{54}\) Derrida, “Force of Law,” p. 4.
Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that Strauss’ political philosophy can be read as a project of securitisation against the dangers he perceived the abyssal encounter to pose. It traced the operation of this logic through the interventions of eight Straussian within and close to the foreign policy establishment in the US during the period leading up to the invasion of Iraq. It explored Strauss’ mobilisation of the Schmittean friend/enemy binary, the rehabilitation of the concept of the ‘tyrannous regime’, and mapped the operation of the conceptualisation of justice as the ‘reason of the strongest’ through the Straussian interventions, demonstrating the centrality of these themes in the processes of opinion formation residing at the heart of the imperative to secure against the abyss. It has argued that this process of securitisation precludes the possibility of attempting to take responsibility for the violence immanent to any and all politico-philosophical positions taken or values held; the attempt to generate totalising opinions by means of which the dangers inherent to the condition of aporia may be offset removes the condition of possibility of gesturing towards responsibility by obscuring contingency and the violence of the founding of any and all such projects.

Part I showed that for Strauss an abyss resides at the core of all political thought. This abyss entails that ideas, values, opinions, in short even the most deeply held beliefs, cannot be deemed anything more than contextually specific or contingently significant. This abyssal encounter amounts to exposing the foundationlessness of all ideas relating to good and evil, all ethical programs, all claims to knowledge insofar as they are always already value-laden; it renders them indefensible as universal or absolute premises. This exposure of contingency spells disaster for Strauss because society stands or falls by virtue of its raison d’être, its shared values, including designated categories of friend and enemy, the tyrannous and democratic regime, which comprise its identity and purpose; without such points of reference, there can be no society as the latter is fundamentally predicated on the binding together of the fates of individuals who share interests, goals, and values. In other words, a variety or relativity of such opinions or values necessarily entails, for Strauss, society’s ruin. Thus a central movement of Strauss’ project may be said to amount to an attempt to defend against this danger, to avoid, resist, mitigate, or master the implications of the abyss; Strauss’ project can be read as a project of securitisation. In this way, despite Strauss’ rejection of the modern project, his thought can be seen to closely reflect that which Dillon identifies as a central attribute of this philosophical epoch.¹

¹ Dillon, Politics of Security, pp. 12-23.
It has been argued that the signifier ‘Straussian’ can be usefully employed in reference to a distinct and distinctive group within and close to the Bush administration due to the intellectual and philosophical concerns they share relating to the abyss which underpins the crisis of the West. Their interventions in the fields of intelligence production, think tanks, and the media have been shown to closely reflect Strauss’ imperative calling for the generation and dissemination of socially salutary opinions in society to counteract the relativism engendered by the exposure of the abyss. This endeavour can be read as a project of the imposition of opinion masquerading as truth for the sake of securing society against the risks associated with the condition of aporia, and the reactionary politics which have been shown to follow in the context of the invasion of Iraq have been illustrated. It has been argued that this securitising logic, far from countering such politics, is, on the contrary, the condition of possibility of them in light of Levinas’ assertion noted in the Introduction that political totalitarianism rests on ontological totalitarianism, that totalising metaphysical premises underpin all (totalising) politics.

Such a totalising imperative is in evidence, Chapter Three showed, in the interventions of the Straussians in the context of the invasion of Iraq. The Straussians can be seen to have followed the logic animating Strauss’ thought to generate and disseminate salutary opinion masquerading as truth, such that policy aims, namely the invasion of Iraq, might be realised. It has not suggested that the Straussians alone made possible the invasion of Iraq, but rather that their interventions in the service of this agenda are clearly discernable and correlate closely to Strauss’ thought and prescriptions for the modern world. This is not to rule out material and other incentives and commitments on the parts of these Straussians, but to posit that this logic played a central role in their activities.

Part II explored the ways in which Derrida’s thought provides a different conception of how the abyss may be responded to, and mobilised this in order to challenge the Straussian project of securitisation. Its motivating force can be put as the imperative to take seriously the contingency and foundationlessness immanent to this condition by endlessly and restlessly destabilising that which may masquerade as foundations as the latter are always and necessarily violent, and because such totalising narratives premises are the condition of possibility for political totalisation. A violence inheres in any and all philosophical projects, indeed it is contained within the constitution of subjectivity. As Drabinski notes, “totality is where I find comforts... My home lies at the centre of the logic of violence.”² This is, then, an ethically motivated project insofar as the imperative it calls for a struggle towards the taking of responsibility for the violence immanent to the holding of positions, the violence of self-realisation and relation to otherness immanent to fractured

² Drabinski, “Beginning’s Abyss.” p. 141
subjectivities: “responsible subjectivity emerges out of the ruins of a collapsed tradition of knowing and being.”

Chapter Four explored a series of Derrida’s alternative interventions relating to issues surrounding the invasion of Iraq, which marked the explicitly policy-related purchase of his thought. While significant in their own right, these were shown to be insufficient as a challenge to the Straussian logic because they amount simply to an alternative series of opinions which cannot in themselves be deemed preferable to the Straussian project due to the condition of aporia underpinning such claims. Accordingly, it problematised the holding of opinion itself and advocated a restless and ceaseless process of deconstruction and/as resistance, by means of which the imposition of totalising onto-political claims may be resisted.

Chapter Five mobilised this conceptualisation of ‘deconstruction and/as resistance’ in order to challenge the Straussian interventions at the level of three of their fundamental assumptions: the Schmittean friend/enemy binary, the rehabilitation of the concept of the ‘regime’, and finally, their conceptualisation of justice as amounting to the ‘reason of the strongest’. It exposed these as necessarily contingent and politically oriented premises, undermining the totalising nature of the Straussian project thereby.

Resisting the impulse to self-exempt or rest, as well as subjecting the Straussian project to this, Chapter Six proceeded to enact such a deconstructive gesture in the context of Derridean thought itself. Part II has thus been structured in such a way that it takes the form of the intervention it calls for, that of deconstruction and/as resistance, performing gestures of destabilisation and unsettling at every stage.

This process does not end with the close of this thesis, indeed a sustained momentum and restlessness is vital if totalising ontology is to be resisted, in other words if responsibility is to be aimed towards in the abyssal condition. Such resistance can only ever fail in the sense that it is never completed, an arrival or space of safety never occurs, but it may point towards the taking of responsibility insofar as it exposes the contingency and indefensibility of ontology. It cannot, then, in itself be deemed ethical, but I would submit that it functions to resist the violence immanent to ontology, and may thereby, in its insistence on the continuous and perpetual destabilisation of any content-filled proposition, amount to a move towards responsibility. Such a restlessness would be very difficult to maintain. It is certainly not ‘possible’ in terms of a resolution or arrival in a space outside of or after it, but the impossibility of its realisation may be the condition of possibility of avoiding the realisation of ontology. What is required, then, is an endless suspending qua the

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3 Drabinski, “Beginning’s Abyss,” p. 145.
differing and deferring of difference, and thereby the possibility of the taking responsibility for one’s always already indefensible position through an exposure of its necessary violence and contingency. For Derrida

it is a question of keeping the play in play, of playing along with the play, of avoiding at all costs the repression of the play.... Metaphysics is the systematic attempt to repress the play, to hold it in check: to create the illusion of abiding truth over and against the flux; to posit metaphysical grounds which cannot be shaken; to establish stable and transparent signs which lead us straight to pure presence.  

As was mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, at the heart of the Straussian project of securitisation, I would suggest, resides a fear, in several senses. Strauss and the Straussians comment explicitly on their concerns relating to the accession of Nazism and associate this explicitly with the exposure of the abyss in Nietzsche and Heidegger’s thought; their project of opinion construction may be read as an attempt to instil values and norms such that the space for the rise of fascism may be closed down. In Bloom’s estimation, there “is no doubt that ‘value relativism,’ if it is believed in, takes one into very dark regions of the soul and very dangerous political experiments.” However, it may be that such a problematisation of ontological foundations represents, on the contrary, the condition of possibility for resistance to such accession; if a totalising politics is dependent upon a totalising ontology, deconstruction and /as resistance may be mobilised to disrupt the imposition of precisely this. In this light, it may be that rather than his engagement with the aporetic condition, Heidegger’s slip into fascism was a consequence of a failure to resist precisely the ontological foreclosure which such a political orientation depends upon. In other words, Heidegger’s alliance with the Nazis may be explained by a slip from a destabilisation of totalising discourses to an affirmation of a particular set of these. It is, then, not the aporetic condition itself which accounts for this but rather Heidegger’s own decision making in light of it. As Dillon notes, his “12-year membership of the Nazi party enforces precisely that questioning attitude toward Heidegger which he himself was concerned to induce...” What Heidegger’s political affiliations show is not, perhaps, that the risks of the abyssal encounter ought to be avoided but rather the need to resist “withering principal referents, against the illusion of any legitimating first that could function as a rule for thinking and as an authority of conduct.” In other words, it demonstrates the need for restless vigilance against the imposition of salutary opinions and legitimating fictions, for resistance to politico-philosophical ontology.

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As well as, and closely related to, this fear of extremism, a sense of fear is in evidence in the Straussian project relating to the relativising connotations of the abyssal encounter; without stable points of reference philosophical and moral immobilisation is risked. As the Introduction noted, this sense of fear is discernable in many challenges to post-positivism in IR and beyond. The loss of foundations and grounding for claims certainly provokes a sense of fear. Like many others, Strauss’ concern was that

once we realize that the principles of our actions have no other support than our blind choice, we really do not believe in them any more. We cannot wholeheartedly act upon them any more. We really cannot live any more as responsible beings. The more we cultivate reason, the more we cultivate nihilism: the less we are able to be loyal members of society.\(^8\)

For Strauss, the exposure of the abyss precludes the possibility of responsibility through its demonstration of the contingency of any and all principles. It may be as a consequence of this that the Straussian project contains within it a tendency to self-exempt through a reliance on premises and opinions which by its own standards are indefensible, namely the friend/enemy dichotomy, the notion of tyrannous regimes and the ideal democracy, and the conceptualisation of justice as the reason of the strongest; at the core of Strauss’ thought resides fear of the levelling effects of the condition of aporia, the meaninglessness exposed by the abyss.

It has been shown that Derrida also notes the dangers and risks associated with the abyssal encounter. Enduring the risk of the abyssal encounter can indeed be deemed dangerous: “much of Nietzsche’s articulation of the process of self-overcoming is suspended over the abyss, which is, perhaps, what maddens the madman.”\(^9\) Following Nietzsche, Derrida advocates a certain courage to face this condition and resist the will to secure against it. There is no possibility of avoiding the abyss without ensuring an autoimmune self-destruction: “We are always at the abyss, at every moment, and it is a question of whether we have courage to see that and to endure and overcome the vertigo induced by the abyss.”\(^10\) Far from silencing, this generates a “wholly different kind of conversation for philosophy. Indeed, this is a conversation with the shared resignation to – even embrace of – the fact that there will be no redemption for the aesthetics of life and response. Rather this is a conversation about how to live with the impossible...”\(^11\) Nietzsche asks:

Have ye courage, O my brethren? Are ye stout-hearted?... He hath heart who knoweth fear, but vanquisheth it; who sees the abyss, but with pride. He who seeth the abyss,

\(^8\) Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, p. 6.
\(^9\) Drabinski, “Beginning’s Abyss,” p. 144.
\(^11\) Drabinski, “Beginning’s Abyss,” p. 146.
but with eagle's eyes, - he who with eagle's talons graspseth the abyss: he hath courage.\textsuperscript{12}

I, along with Derrida and Nietzsche, would call for this certain courage in the attempt to contend with and think along with the condition of the abyss, and to resist the will to secure against it.

Derrida notes Nietzsche’s demand that good conscience be discarded and his call for a new philosophy which “will accept the contradiction, the opposition of the coexistence of incompatible values.” It “will seek neither to hide this possibility nor to forget it; nor will [it] seek to surmount it.”\textsuperscript{13} Thinkers of such philosophy will, according to Nietzsche, ‘create value’; they will “subjugate the past and... grasp the future with a creative hand.”\textsuperscript{14} By this, Nietzsche seems to suggest that philosophers of the future, in spite of the knowledge of the impossibility of ‘true’ moral values, must nonetheless become the authors of new beliefs for the future, it is desirable that they take on this role: “Their ‘knowing’ is creating, their creating is law-giving, their will to truth is – \textit{Will to Power}.”\textsuperscript{15} These new philosophers will, then, put “the vivisector’s knife to the breast of the very \textit{virtues of their age}”\textsuperscript{16} While emphatically not claiming to have succeeded in this endeavour, this thesis has attempted to take seriously the implications of the aporetic condition of foundational value-laden premises. It has argued that as a consequence of the abyss which undermines the possibility of foundational or transcendental premises or values, any attempt to appeal to these amounts to an indefensible violence. The political philosophy of Strauss was shown to recognise this indefensibility but to enact a project of securitisation against the perceived dangers of this condition. It has been argued that by mobilising deconstruction such violent imposition can be resisted; any and all totalising logics, which is to say all logics, can be unsettled through this gesture. Because we cannot choose between alternative premises and values, any and all should be subject to this destabilisation in order to resist their imposition as totalising ontological principles. To avoid simply substituting one set of totalising premises and commitments for another, deconstruction and/as resistance may be employed to restlessly and perpetually unsettle any and all narratives such that they may not become ingrained and totalising. The call here is to resist the impulse to secure against the abyssal encounter; if responsibility is to be gestured towards the violence and contingency that inheres within any and all politico-philosophical projects must be contended with by exposing their aporetic foundations. As Beardsworth notes, one’s “relation to aporia must...

\textsuperscript{12} Nietzsche, \textit{Thus Spake Zarathustra}, p. 276.  
\textsuperscript{13} Derrida, \textit{The Politics of Friendship}, p. 34.  
\textsuperscript{14} Nietzsche, \textit{Beyond Good and Evil}, p. 83.  
\textsuperscript{15} Nietzsche, \textit{Beyond Good and Evil}, p. 83.  
\textsuperscript{16} Nietzsche, \textit{Beyond Good and Evil}, p. 83.
be itself aporetic, if the experience of aporia is to remain an impossible one. Otherwise one will end up as much in the piety of the ‘other’ as in the piety of ‘being’.”

This is not to advocate abstention from the taking of decisions or positions but amounts, rather, to an intervention to mark the necessarily immanent violence of any and all of these, and to demonstrate that no abstention is possible; positions and decisions are always already being taken. The possibility of being ‘right’ or ‘moral’ died with God in Nietzsche’s exposure of the abyss. For both Strauss and Derrida, the cost of thinking in light of the abyss “would be giving up the dream of mastery that configures the heroic in Eurocentric masculinist imagination...” What remains, however, is the possibility of attempting to take responsibility for the indefensibility of one’s position. One always already has taken a position, even and especially if it is silence, and this position is always already indefensible and inherently violent. A restless and endless excavation and exposure of this violence precludes the possibility of it becoming totalising, thereby resting the violence of ontology. A deconstructive approach can thus allow a resistance to the foreclosure of commitments and positions into ontology by insisting that they remain contingent and continuously unsettled. It is, then, an attempt to take the violence of positions and decisions as seriously as possible, an attempt to take responsibility for the violence that inheres therein. Thinking in light of the abyssal encounter would seem, then, to be paramount in the struggle to approach responsibility. Such a struggle is endless and no arrival or victory can be possible as this would lead back to the totalising logic of the logos. Rather, this entails perpetual restlessness and momentum, a ceaseless series of interventions aimed towards resisting the imposition of totalisation in all its forms. This thesis has enacted such an intervention in the contexts of the Straussian position and also the Derridean. It thus gestures towards taking responsibility by resisting the will to self-exempt and render one’s position secure thereby.

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17 Beardsworth, *Derrida & the Political*, p. 104.


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