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Review essay

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Annotated Review Essay on Laurence Lampert's Beijing Lectures

Abstract

A detailed analysis of Laurence Lampert's Beijing Lectures on Leo Strauss, Plato, and Nietzsche (delivered in 2015) highlights how the book distills a lifetime of Lampert's scholarship (1941–2024) on the trio. His earlier works—imaginative, meticulous, and elegantly written though often lengthy—are here rendered in a more accessible form: tightly focused, architecturally clear, syntactically simple, and without footnotes. My review therefore provides citations and biographical details for the many sources Lampert draws on. Subtitled "Philosophy and Its Poetry," the lectures argue that all three thinkers depict great philosophers as moving from rigorous ontological inquiry to crafting political-theological teachings that harmonize with reality. Lampert relies on Strauss's recovery of the multilayered, sometimes secretive "art of writing" used by Plato and others to navigate their societies and advance future-oriented aims. Lampert also stresses the paths that Strauss, Nietzsche, and Plato's Socrates followed in developing both insights and rhetoric. While summarizing the chapters on each author, my review adds context, raises a few objections, and considers the book's implications for elevating readers and informing philanthropic efforts, especially in environmentalism.

Key Words: Laurence Lampert, Leo Strauss, Plato, Nietzsche, and philosophical philanthropy

"[W]ords and songs spring out of us by nature, generated by our fruitful soil" (194)

These lectures by Laurence Lampert (1941 – 2024) condense a lifetime of imaginative, innovative, and meticulous scholarship into roughly 200 pages (and fewer than 60,000 words). That scholarship, furthermore, is vastly easier to absorb than are the three authors—Plato, Nietzsche, and Leo Strauss—upon which it focuses. Everything Lampert writes, finally, stands out for its clarity, efficiency, and literary elegance.

There are six lectures of roughly equal length, delivered in 2015. The first two focus on Strauss, the next two on Plato, and the final pair on Nietzsche. These three authors were manifestly the main focus of Lampert's scholarship, and he wrote two or more dense and pathbreaking books about each of them. There is little in the lectures that he has not developed at length elsewhere—including two books that were published after 2015. The presentation here,

however, is very tightly focused, and much less scholarly: the syntax is simpler, and there is more "architecture" (summaries and anticipations), while there are fewer citations and no footnotes. The lectures also include more italics (all the italics below within quotations were present in the original).

To assist the well-trained students who attended the lectures at Renmin University in Beijing, Lampert distributed printed copies in advance (ix). Because the book rarely supplies citations and never provides bibliographic details for the works he quotes, I shall usually add them. To assist my readers, finally, I'll almost always use 'scare quotes' when I'm quoting passages Lampert has quoted.

As an interpreter, Lampert is heavily indebted to Strauss—who "rediscovered the philosophic art of writing and then wrote about it or disclosed it as no previous philosopher ever had" (xiv)—and Lampert consistently highlights that art. He even ties Straussian hermeneutics to Nietzsche and Plato in his subtitle, "Philosophy and Its Poetry."

Lampert quotes—and sympathizes with—Nietzsche's 1886 claim (in *BGE* §191)[1] that Plato was the philosopher who had "the greatest strength any philosopher has so far had at his disposal" (93). Lampert develops this thesis by explaining how Plato's dialogues bequeathed the poetry of a transcendent and unchanging "good" supported by a divine realm that enforces morality in the afterlife. He also explains how, between the lines, Plato conveyed the highly rational claim that "being" was essentially eros, a time-bound striving that links him to Nietzsche and the will to power. Lampert aligns with Nietzsche, "the philosopher of our time" (xiv), conveying huge reservations about the Christian civilization they both trace to Plato—and about the allegedly derivative "modern" enterprise to create heaven on earth with science and industry. Unlike all three sphinxes, however, Lampert here (as elsewhere) lays all his cards on the table, in effect trying to consign Christian otherworldliness and other "noble lies" to the dustbin of history. In attempting to honor Lampert, I too shall write bluntly.

Lampert starts with the most recent author because Strauss's "history of political philosophy" illuminates crucial subtleties in the other two. These subtleties include Plato's attempts to promote "ministerial poetry" (Strauss's phrase); the resemblance between the Nietzschean "will to power" and Platonic eros; and the way that Nietzsche moves from the fundamental ontology of that will to an affirmative vision of "eternal return," which can reorient Western civilization after the death of God. For Lampert, furthermore, Nietzsche's poetry, particularly its "love of the earth," can now be developed fruitfully in connection with environmentalism.

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1 For three of the books that the lectures examine, I shall use abbreviations. *BGE* = *Beyond Good and Evil*. *CM* = *The City and Man* by Leo Strauss (Chicago, IL: Rand McNally, 1964). *SPPP* = *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* by Leo Strauss (University of Chicago Press, 1983). I'll be citing the first by section number, but I'll often omit the § symbol.

Lampert exalts Plato and Nietzsche, and describes himself (borrowing a phrase from Nietzsche) as being merely a "philosophic laborer" (xiv). That category manifestly includes me, and regarding all four of these authors my contributions could never match what Lampert did with the trio. While summarizing the lectures, however, I'll occasionally provide background information to assist *Philanthropia* readers from diverse occupations and disciplines. I'll also try to add value by highlighting the book's implications for philanthropy, by occasionally citing other writings where Lampert develops a pivotal topic at greater length—and by raising a few doubts about Lampert's project. He and Nietzsche portray Odysseus as a founder, but I'll merely offer suggestions, and I'll refrain from killing any suitors. I have elsewhere discussed most of Lampert's publications.[2]

The first two lectures focus on Strauss's 1938-39 letters to Jacob Klein, some poetic aspects illuminated by *The City and Man*, and his late chapter on *Beyond Good and Evil*.

LECTURE ONE:
Strauss Recovers the Tradition of Philosophic Poetry (3-32)

Jacob Klein was a lifelong friend of Strauss's who taught at St. John's College from 1938 until his death in 1978. With the letters to Klein, most of which have not been translated from German into English, Lampert might be more descriptive than analytical. The letters Lampert discusses excitedly convey Strauss's discoveries of "exotericism"—the infamous art of writing whereby past philosophers secreted certain important teachings "between the lines." In Lampert's deft formulation, such writing

> allows the philosopher to convey what he *thinks*—the esoteric part—through what he *says*—the exoteric part—without saying directly or simply putting into words what he thinks. It is an art of writing that is both a showing and a hiding: the artfulness of the showing consists in the shown leading to the not-shown, to the hidden. And the hidden is always what matters most—what *you*, if you're interested but only if you're interested, can find out on your own. And finding it out, you will treasure it all the more because you found it out on your own (xiii).

Although Strauss's first book, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (1928), described Maimonides (~1138 - 1204) as 'a believing Jew,' Strauss's 1/20/1938 letter to Klein asserted that he was instead 'a truly free mind' who was 'persuaded' that the world was eternal. As Lampert notes, Maimonides thus "rejected the Bible's view" and sided with philosophy (5). In a February letter,

2 In the interests of full "disclosure," I note that I exchanged a few brief emails with the author and provided a blurb for the *Beijing Lectures*. But Lampert and I never met or spoke.

Strauss was even bolder: Maimonides 'in his beliefs was *absolutely* no Jew.' This revelation, furthermore, is of 'considerable present-day significance' because, by proving it, 'the incompatibility in principle of philosophy and Judaism would be demonstrated to the eye' (6). Lampert doesn't pause to note the exaggeration: even if Maimonides proved to be a resolute atheist, there might be ways of harmonizing philosophy and Judaism.

Given Maimonides' status as a 'truly free' mind, Strauss adds that 'the crucial question for him . . . was whether the ideal lawgiver must be a prophet.' Lampert elsewhere celebrates Nietzsche's claim that "genuine" philosophers are "lawgivers and commanders" (*BGE* 211), not just knowers and enlighteners, and his lecture offers this powerful elaboration regarding Strauss's Maimonides:

> Judaism is a tradition of *law* and the Jewish lawgiver was Moses, the most important figure in the Jewish Bible. In Plato the *philosopher* is the ideal lawgiver. So the question as Strauss now saw it was this: Must the philosopher-lawgiver also be sent from God? That is, be seen as sent from God, present himself as sent from God? (5)

This poetic strand Strauss perceived in Maimonides—whom Lampert dubs "the greatest teacher of Judaism" (6)—also surfaces in what subsequent letters to Klein say about classical authors. In a November letter, for example, Strauss proclaims that Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon 'are *no* historians—of course not—but authors of exoteric . . . writings.' Strauss went on to publish major studies of the last two, and his students (e.g., Seth Benardete) have tackled Herodotus. Lampert plausibly adds that Strauss's "greatest achievements" include "his recovery of Xenophon, the genuine Xenophon, the philosopher," whose Socrates does not differ "*fundamentally*" from Plato's (12). In the 2/16/39 letter, Strauss radically asserts that Xenophon was a superlative 'trickster' who had 'the courage to clothe himself as an idiot and go through the millennia that way' (13). Among the shocking teachings Strauss here perceived in both Xenophon and Socrates is that 'morality is purely exoteric' (13), and that *sôphrosunê* (traditionally translated as "moderation" or "temperance") is 'essentially self-control in the expression of opinions' (14).[3] From here, Lampert illuminates additional considerations that motivate exotericism:

> what the *philosopher*, the one who lives the theoretical life, comes to know can destroy the foundation of the society of which he is a part. . . . Exotericism protects society from philosophy and protects the philosopher from society (15).

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3 For a sample of the ingenuity with which Lampert's second Strauss book uncovered Strauss's ingenuity in interpreting Xenophon, see https://claremontreviewofbooks.com/digital/the-enduring-problem-of-leo-strauss/.

As the masthead of this journal notes, philanthropy is "voluntary action intended for the public good," and it originated in Periclean Athens as a philosophical term "closely associated with the concept of *paideia*, understood as education and acculturation with the aim of attaining the virtues." As interpreted by Lampert and Strauss, Nietzsche aligns with both Plato and Xenophon by impugning certain moral virtues that have been widely and deeply shared. As I'll elaborate below, however, Lampert presents his lifetime of assiduous scholarship as a tool for promoting the intertwined "public good" of the human race and of the planet it inhabits. Strauss, Lampert adds, "developed his own manner of exoteric writing." Because his approach was "much more open than the traditional manners" and eventually "establish[ed] a tradition of reading *that would make the philosophers' esoteric* understanding more generally available" (18), Strauss too deserves credit for both *paideia* and philanthropy.

From a 10/10 letter to Klein that discusses Hesiod's *Theogony*, Lampert infers that, in Strauss's view, "gods who care about the human things" are "the inventions of wise poets like Hesiod." Since Strauss then links Hesiod with Homer, Lampert proffers the provocative hypothesis that "wisdom is knowledge of nature and human nature, and knowledge of what a god is" (16).[4] It would be difficult to dispute Lampert's conclusion that Strauss, in these letters to Klein, was sketching "the very matters that will occupy him for his whole life" (16).

Lampert scrutinizes Strauss's art of writing in his second lecture, focusing on things Strauss did years later to illuminate some poetic strands of Plato and Nietzsche. In discussing the chapter on Plato's *Republic* in Strauss's 1964 book, *The City and Man*, Lampert highlights Strauss's well-known suggestion that the center of a transgressive text is likely to be more revealing than either the beginning or the ending (the latter two, being more conspicuous and easier to explore, will usually attract more attention from both the general public and an official censor). After a general discussion of Plato's approach to writing in the chapter's first 13 paragraphs, which conclude with a dash, Strauss's remaining 65 paragraphs scrutinize the *Republic*, a book still famous for its idealistic "city in speech" (369c). The central paragraph of this section, according to Lampert, "deals with the central" matter (20), the "musical" education the city's young "guardians" will receive, especially regarding the gods.[5] Lampert proceeds to scrutinize the two central sentences within the long central paragraph.

To 'indicate the right kind' of stories and songs, according to Strauss,

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4 Strauss wrote very little about Homer. Here (and elsewhere), Lampert credits Seth Benardete's 1997 book, *The Bow and the Lyre*, for demonstrating that "the founding *poet* of Greece is also its founding *philosopher*" (17).

5 This paragraph occupies pages 97-100 of *The City and Man*.

Socrates 'lays down two laws' for the gods;[6] Strauss adds that even the 'untrue' stories will be fed to 'the grown-up citizens of the good city,' not just to the children (21). The discussion here between Socrates and Adeimantus reflects 'the implicit premise that there are gods, or that there is a god and that they know what a god is' (*CM*, 98). Socrates begins to found the city in speech when responding to the long speeches with which brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus—picking up the ultra-cynical critique of justice that Thrasymachus had previously introduced—launched the second of the *Republic*'s ten books. Drawing on Adeimantus's speech, Lampert soundly infers that Plato is portraying him as "a young man who has begun to lose his confidence in the [Homeric] stories about the gods that he had absorbed as a child" (23). More specifically, Socrates is

> legislating what a god is for tortured Adeimantus, a young man who thinks he knows what a god is but is critical of the *actions* of the gods in the stories he was raised to believe and is tempted not to believe them or not to trust the gods. What Socrates does is alter or modify the gods Adeimantus thinks he knows in order to make them more moral, make them more worthy of Adeimantus's respect and honor (27-28).

Another key inference Lampert draws is that Adeimantus is neither a philosopher nor a "potential philosopher" (24).

Socrates makes his infamous pitch for philosopher kings, who emerge from the guardian class to rule the communist city absolutely, in the middle of the dialogue. At the center of his essay, Strauss thus shows "how Socrates the philosopher actually ruled: a philosopher rules by laying down new laws for the gods; a philosopher rules by ruling the view of the gods that will rule the minds of the young men" (27).[7] Plato's Socrates, consequently, leaves Homer and Hesiod behind. The last book of the *Republic*, which ends with the myth of Er, goes farther by making the gods "the moral judges of human behavior" and making the soul immortal, "living out its next life in reward and punishment for its actions in this life" (29). Much more controversially, Lampert adds that the "new teaching by Platonic philosophers" proved "*disastrous*" by "opening the way for Revelation or Christianity" (30). Strauss never published such a radical claim about Plato or Christianity, and this is probably one reason that Lampert describes himself as a Nietzschean and not a Straussian.

Near the end of the first lecture, Lampert highlights that the Strauss chapter later describes the above-sketched theological innovations by Socrates

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6 The two laws, I infer, are these: the god, being really good, does not inflict harms on us (*Republic,* 379b, 380c); the gods are unchanging and do not mislead us (382e - 383a).

7 Lampert also makes deft use of the Strauss paragraph that precedes the central one. In sketching how the *Republic* initially introduced philosophy, Strauss here noted that 'the highest art, the art directing all the other arts . . . will prove to be philosophy' (27, quoting *CM*, 97). The Greek term for art describes doing or making, not primarily the creative arts.

as "ministerial poetry" (*CM*, 136-37), and Lampert uses all this to explain his subtitle, "Philosophy and Its Poetry":

> *philosophy*, the drive to understand, comes to understand; and out of that understanding it generates or gives birth to a poetry that *ministers* to *its* interests while ministering as well to the larger civil community within which alone philosophy can prosper (31).

Regarding philanthropy, this could suggest a proverbial "win win." To benefit society, a philosopher presents edifying teachings that are ultimately grounded in rational and informed insights, but he or she also strives to protect society against the destructive actions those insights might precipitate.[8]

LECTURE TWO:
Strauss, Nietzsche and the Philosophic Poetry of the Future (35-64)

Lampert's second lecture explores philosophic poetry as illuminated by Strauss's chapter on *BGE* in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, his last book (published posthumously in 1983).[9] Drawing on three considerations—the title of the collection, the chapter's placement in the center (which makes it depart from the "roughly chronological" pattern that characterizes the other fourteen chapters), and the fact that it follows the "Jerusalem and Athens" chapter—Lampert plausibly suggests that, in Strauss's mind, Nietzsche "now occupies the central place, just after Jerusalem and Athens," in "the study of Platonic political philosophy" (36). Indeed, the chapter soon implies that *BGE* echoes Plato because of its 'graceful subtlety as regards form, as regards intention, as regards the art of silence' (36-37). Lampert then sketches a momentous conclusion that his remaining lectures will defend: Plato and Nietzsche both "platonize in the service of philosophy" (39). They nonetheless differ in important ways. For example, Nietzsche was an avowed atheist who attributed quasi-divine status to the rare "genuine" philosophers who found or transform cultures (*BGE* 211); he and Plato also confronted distinct "spiritual situation[s]" and differed regarding "what the times required" (39-40). To suggest that Strauss's Plato similarly exalted the cultural impact of certain philosophers (see the discussion above of Maimonides et al.), Lampert cites brief sections in the *SPPP* chapter. Lampert is certainly on solid ground when

8 For an authoritative recent discussion, see Arthur M. Melzer, *Philosophy Between the Lines: The Lost History of Esoteric Writing* (University of Chicago Press, 2014). For what might be Lampert's longest explanation of the relevant philanthropy, see *Nietzsche and Modern Times: A Study of Bacon and Descartes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 126-41.

9 To supplement what the lecture illuminates in this chapter, interested readers can consult Lampert's 1996 book, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche* (University of Chicago Press, 1996). It provides a 91-page commentary on Strauss's 17-page chapter, which is reproduced as an appendix.

he states that the chapter's "chief interest" is in Nietzsche's "theological-political program or his *philosophic poetry* in its aspect as religion" (41-42).

The lecture proceeds to note that, as presented by Strauss based on *BGE* 36—and affirmed by Lampert—the "*will to power* is Nietzsche's name for the being of beings, the nature of nature" (42). Lampert then quotes this memorable passage from Strauss: 'The will to power takes the place which the *eros*—the striving for "the good in itself"—occupies in Plato's thought' (43). According to Lampert, however, Strauss here was being coy, and Lampert will later argue that eros and the will to power are "close kin" (162).

BGE 36 presents a straightforward and attractively tentative argument on behalf of the will to power. "Assuming that our world of desires and passions is the only thing 'given' as real," Nietzsche begins, mightn't such a given suffice to "render the so-called mechanistic (and thus material) world comprehensible as well?" If the will *is* efficacious, Nietzsche continues, we must "attempt to hypothetically posit the causality of the will as the only type of causality there is." And since the "entire" human "life of drives" expresses the will to power, Nietzsche can plausibly—but hardly definitively—proceed to "designate *all* efficacious force as: *will to power*." The aphorism concludes powerfully by inferring that "[t]he world seen from inside, the world determined and described with respect to its 'intelligible character'—would be just this 'will to power' and nothing else."

In his next aphorism, Nietzsche surprisingly imagines that his "friends" will object that he is replacing God by the devil. Based on other passages in *BGE*, and with an assist from Strauss, Lampert offers this compelling explanation about "the free minds" that are Nietzsche's friends (the chapter is titled, "The Free Mind [*Geist*]"):

> they do not believe in God or the devil. But as modern free minds they no longer have a language that can state strongly enough just how *criminal* they find Nietzsche's conclusion. So they adopt the old language, the popular language, for a moment and use *its* extremes, God and devil, to express their shock at his crime (47).

The dead God, Lampert concludes, "still defines even for Nietzsche's free-minded friends *what a God is*" (48). Along the way, Lampert amplifies the anti-Christian implications in a manner that Strauss never did:

> if it's true that the totality of the world is will to power and nothing else, there is nothing beyond the world different from the world. Nietzsche's reasoning refutes a transcendent God. But the transcendent God of Christianity had condemned the world as the kingdom of darkness, as the place of the devil from which he would redeem us. So . . . *that* God, the refuted God, is the *devil*, the refuted devil (47).[10]

10 Nietzsche launched *BGE* by claiming that Plato's dogmatic "invention of pure spirit and the Good in itself" was "the worst, the most prolonged, and the most dangerous of all errors," in part because it spawned "the Christian-ecclesiastical pressure of millennia."

Regarding the above-mentioned "theological-political program" that Strauss highlighted in *BGE*, Lampert quotes his striking claim (*SPPP*, 178) that '[t]he doctrine of the will to power—the whole doctrine of *Beyond Good and Evil*—is in a manner a vindication of God' (48). Adding that Strauss uses the vindication phrase four more times (49), he teases out an explanation from Strauss about how and why the atheist Nietzsche vindicates God. From *BGE* 150,[11] Strauss later suggests that a livable "world" for humans requires the divine, and Lampert amplifies this thesis by recounting the two Nietzsche citations that Strauss added (49). As Lampert later elaborates, that world would be "the cultural world as a place of meaning and significance" (53).

After the dramatic "vindication" passage, Strauss proceeds to discuss *BGE*'s chapter on religion. As both Lampert and Strauss emphasize, *BGE* 55 provides a stunning lamentation about the despair that God's death will bring to the human race: the sacrifice of "all comfort and hope, everything holy or healing, any faith in a hidden harmony or a future filled with justice and bliss." According to Strauss, however, Nietzsche aimed at extracting a "life-inspiring" truth from the "deadly" truth of God's death, since *BGE* 56 attractively sketches "the ideal belonging to the religion of the future" (*SPPP*, 180). That ideal is Nietzsche's famous doctrine of "eternal return": not just accepting "what was and what is," but wanting it "again *just as it was and is* through all eternity" (§56). Drawing on certain subtleties in Strauss's wording, Lampert then suggests that Nietzsche "did not *intend* to find a new ideal; instead, he found a new ideal as a consequence of his passion for the truth, as a consequence of his discovery that the world is will to power." Here again, according to Lampert, "philosophy led to philosophic poetry" (53).

Lampert proceeds to elaborate two points from Strauss: the great ambiguity in *circulus vitiosus deus*, the Latin phrase with which Nietzsche concludes §56, and the structural resemblances between §36-37 (where the will to power allegedly vindicated God) and §55-56. Lampert then offers a stunning inference: "eternal return is not a *vicious* circle but, on the contrary, the *virtuous* circle of life made eternal, made god in some sense." By making "the whole natural cycle of things" divine, eternal return provides "a non-theistic vindication of God" (54). Such "inner coherence," Lampert adds, is "the deepest *platonizing*" in Nietzsche and illuminates how he was a "*Platonic political philosopher*, a philosopher who succeeded in doing what Plato did":

> First comes the *esoteric insight* into the world reserved for the philosopher, wholly a matter for the intellect. Then comes *an exoteric teaching* for all, a teaching founded on the human

11 "Around the hero everything turns into tragedy; around the demigod everything turns into a satyr play; and around God everything turns into—what? Perhaps 'world'?" (*BGE* 150). Here, and in a few other places, I am quoting the 2002 Cambridge University Press translation by Judith Norman.

> passions that makes a mere totality into a world, a livable world for human communities (55).

Lampert returns to *BGE* 56 in his last lecture, "Nietzsche's Philosophic Poetry." He credits Strauss again, but also examines Nietzsche's daunting claim that the affirmer of eternal return is "insatiably shouting *da capo* not just to himself but to the whole play and performance" and to "the one who needs precisely this performance—and makes it necessary" because he repeatedly "needs himself—and makes himself necessary." This, Nietzsche concludes, would be the *circulus vitiosus deus*. And here is Lampert's final comment about it:

> The affirmation of the whole spectacle is ultimately the self-affirmation of the human spectator on the spectacle—the affirmation is an affirmation of the world because the world makes the philosopher possible, because the world generated a spectator who is a rational, self-conscious, knowing fragment of the knowable whole (179).

The world and nature, one may infer, deserve reverence and gratitude.[12]

Nature remains prominent in Lampert's next section on Strauss's Nietzsche, which focuses on morals and politics, though here he focuses on *BGE*'s later invocation of "the terrible basic text of *homo natura*"; Nietzsche strives to "translate humanity back into nature" (§230). According to Lampert, the distortion came from "thousands of years of moral thinking according to which humanity is in some way both subnatural and supernatural" (57). Lampert here highlights Strauss's emphasis on the "complementary man" that *BGE* mentions once but Strauss references five times. According to Lampert, Nietzsche is describing "*the philosopher* at this point in human history, the philosopher as thinker and actor" (57). *BGE* 207 characterizes the philosopher as the "sort of complementary person in which the *rest* of existence justifies itself." Much earlier, the book surprisingly celebrated Aristophanes as "that transfiguring complementary spirit for whose sake we can *forgive* the whole Greek world" (§28).

According to Strauss, the complementary man 'solves the highest, the most difficult problem.' The problem, at least for Strauss's Nietzsche, is that 'man is conquering nature and there are no assignable limits to that conquest.' People, moreover, have 'come to think of abolishing suffering and inequality'; Strauss cites §239 and §257 to document Nietzsche's view that 'suffering and inequality are the prerequisites of human greatness.' Lampert adds, channeling Nietzsche, that this campaign against suffering and inequality reflects "the modern, secular version of Christian virtue" (58). The greatest danger, finally, is that philosophy itself would die (58-59).

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12 For a more detailed discussion of *BGE* §55-56, see Lampert's 2001 commentary, *Nietzsche's Task: An Interpretation of* Beyond Good and Evil (Yale University Press), 114-23.

Lampert wisely emphasizes that the problem includes "the *technological conquest of nature*" (57). As Lampert says here, and will amplify later, the love and gratitude that would characterize someone who embraces eternal return would assign "limits to the conquest of nature, *beloved* nature." Nietzsche's philosophy, correspondingly, is "*the first comprehensive ecological philosophy*, the philosophy whose moral imperative is the one that Nietzsche's Zarathustra announced at his beginning: 'Be true to the earth!' or 'Be loyal to the earth!'" (60). In the final section of the second lecture, Lampert begins by asserting that "the founding of the modern world in Western Europe is the great event in philosophy and philosophy's poetry that still surrounds us" (62). He credits Strauss's *Thoughts on Machiavelli* for showing that Machiavelli was the "initial great founder," and identifies Bacon and Descartes as the two "philosophic followers" of Machiavelli whose "*exoteric* writings led to the establishment of the scientific and technological view of nature" (Lampert here mentions his 1993 book, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, which discussed this pair in detail). With assistance from Montaigne, Hobbes, Spinoza, and additional modern authors who fought against "the kingdom of darkness," Christianity—"a ruling religion whose warring fanaticism in their time cost Europe the Renaissance"—was eventually tamed (62-63) as their "conscious secularization of the Christian dream gradually re-focused European dreaming on worldly rather than heavenly ends." Nietzsche, meanwhile, "embraced the *scientific* aspects of the modern revolution while modifying or assigning limits to its *technological* aspects" (63).

LECTURE THREE:
Socrates' Philosophic Poetry (67-94)

When calling Plato "the absolute master" of exoteric writing in philosophy (67), Lampert signals a major debt to Strauss. As discussed above, he lauds Strauss for subtly hinting that Socrates in the *Republic*, responding to the looming death of the Homeric gods, was providing 'ministerial poetry' that legislated a new theology whereby the gods moralistically rewarded or punished people in the afterlife. In this lecture, Lampert adds a type of argument that clearly goes beyond Strauss. He will argue that Plato showed how Socrates "came to understand" both the "fundamental truths of being and knowing" (regarding nature as well as human nature) [67] and what it was "necessary for a philosopher to *do* in his time and place," i.e., as a teacher of a "theological-political view" or philosophic poetry (68). A fierce critic of "historicism," particularly its attempts to portray philosophers as being prisoners of some *Zeitgeist*, Strauss typically strives to work out an author's "teaching" without relying upon the "contexts" and biographical details that historians typically prioritize.

Like Strauss, however, Lampert highlights what Plato communicates directly (i.e., beyond the long and very complex speeches his dialogues present) by structural elements, including whether a dialogue is performed (like a play) or narrated/reported.[13] Only nine of the 35 dialogues are narrated, and Lampert will emphasize them. His first Plato lecture addresses three of the six dialogues that Socrates narrated: *Protagoras*, *Charmides*, and *Republic*.

Despite Strauss's extraordinary attention to detail, he left "some very important features of the dramatic dates either not observed or not commented on" (69). Regarding the *Republic*, indeed, Lampert thinks Strauss errs (on *CM*, 62) by denying that 'the time, i.e. the year,' of the conversation is 'made quite clear.' The narrator Socrates began by specifying "yesterday" as the time of the conversation, and Lampert (unlike Strauss) maintains that the dialogue also reveals the year (70). Socrates stated that he and Glaucon had just attended a goddess-honoring festival held "for the first time," and Thrasymachus later noted that the festival honored Bendis, a *foreign* divinity. According to Lampert, that was "a famous day, a momentous day" because "pious Athens" then did something "totally new in the experience of any Athenian alive at that time." Based on intense and rigorous sleuthing by his former student, Christopher Planeaux, Lampert says with "some certainty" that the conversation took place in June of 429 B.C.E. (71).[14] Drawing on what Thucydides recorded regarding the war with Sparta—and the hideous plague that began during the prior summer—Lampert says Plato set the dialogue "in a time of extreme Athenian crisis." Thucydides also suggested that Athens was then suffering from "the deepest possible spiritual crisis" (72).

Lampert develops the dating when he quotes the first sentence of Plato's *Charmides*. After 'some time away,' Socrates had the previous day returned to his usual haunts from the 'camp' in Potidaea, where the army had been for three years. That is vague, but he soon references a battle 'just before' he'd departed (153b).[15] According to Lampert, that references "the great Athenian defeat" (72) whose date "every Athenian who was interested" in the war would have known. Based on Planeaux, who draws partly on Thucydides,

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13 Lampert also follows Strauss in eschewing the "different sort of dating" that predominates among Plato specialists: "the time in Plato's life in which he supposedly *wrote* them." Because the latter is "always only a scholar's theory," we should instead direct our attention to "what is not a theory, the dates on which Plato set them" (69).

14 See Christopher Planeaux, "The Date of Bendis' Entry into Attica," *Classical Journal* 96, no. 2 (December-January 2000-2001): 165-92; and "Socrates, Bendis, and Cephalus: Does Plato's *Republic* Have an Historical Setting?" in George A. Dunn and Mango Telli, eds., *A New Politics for Philosophy: Perspectives on Plato, Nietzsche, and Strauss* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2022), 67-97. Lampert will also draw on Planeaux's article, "Socrates, Alcibiades, and Plato's *ta poteideatika*: Does the *Charmides* Have an Historical Setting?" *Mnemosyne* 52 (1999): 72-77.

15 To assist my readers, I'll generally add the Stephanus lines for Plato quotations, sometimes paired with page citations from Lampert's lecture.

the dialogue is set in late May, 429 (an inference currently accepted by conventional scholars).

Socrates adds that he came back different, having learned things from 'a doctor of Zalmoxis' (156d). Since the *Republic* was set a month later, readers are invited to consider that he then related some new things he had learned in Potidaea (73). To hypothesize about how Socrates' thinking had evolved, we can consult the *Protagoras*, which was apparently set around 434, before the war, a date that marks it as the earliest of the dated dialogues. Three other dialogues (*Symposium*, *Phaedo*, and *Parmenides*) are set later, but they include comments about a still younger Socrates. All three, furthermore, show a young Socrates at a "*turning point* in his philosophic life" (74). So he completed his "philosophic education" before 434, and the *Protagoras* shows his initial foray onto "the public stage" (75).

Socrates, roughly 36, here "arranges" a philosophical "contest" with the older Protagoras, a famous sophist and the "founder of the Greek enlightenment." In Lampert's subtle and potent interpretation, Socrates proceeds to restrain and redirect the sophist because he had been "*too outspoken*" and had thereby put "Greek wisdom, Greek philosophy, at risk" (75). Read carefully, indeed, the dialogue shows that Protagoras knows and even "respects" the "distinction between the exoteric and the esoteric." The other crucial point that Lampert perceives hinges on the presence of Alcibiades, a young man (not yet twenty) with staggering political potential. Lampert's Socrates does not "aim" to make Alcibiades a philosopher. He instead wants him to "maintain in Athens a public spirit friendly to philosophy" (76).

Turning back to the *Charmides*, Lampert notes the close attention it pays to Homer, "the founding poet of Greek civilization revered by all Greeks as the wisest and most authoritative of teachers and memorized by young men inclined to learning." Lampert endorses Benardete's argument that the true odyssey of Odysseus, who eventually returns to Ithaca as a masked beggar, was his "gradual" wisening via both philosophy and political philosophy (77). All four of the references in the *Charmides* to this epic are to "*recognition scenes.*" Returning to his above-sketched perspective on philosopher kings, Lampert brilliantly maintains that the *Charmides* Socrates is "*a new returning Odysseus*, a returning wise king, openly returning but returning hiddenly as a wise man with a political project through which he will rule." The new founding that Odysseus ultimately initiates is "a new *political order* that will not be dependent on a rare wise man like himself to rule it"; it instead seeks to promote "the *succession* of wise rule without wise rulers." And this in turn requires "a new *teaching on the gods*" (78).

Lampert develops these strands to suggest that Socrates in the *Charmides* attempts "a founding deed that is a *theological-political* program" (78). Socrates is introduced as a doctor possessing a drug that might cure Charmides' illness (155b). Socrates first mentions a healing leaf, but adds that certain

'*incantations*' are also necessary (155e). Socrates allegedly learned these (while away) from the above-mentioned doctor of Zalmoxis, a god who insists that 'beautiful speeches' must be included, and Socrates adds that Zalmoxin doctors 'even *immortalize* people' (156d). To amplify and further explain the importance of Zalmoxis, Lampert channels Herodotus, the obvious source, although Plato doesn't name him. In Lampert's summary, Herodotus showed that "the people who believe in Zalmoxis believe they are *immortal* and that their god is *the only God*." These people (the Getae), furthermore, are "*the most courageous and most just* of peoples, the only people to effectively resist the Persian invaders."[16] By teaching that "there is only one God and that the soul is immortal," Lampert concludes, the doctor "taught Socrates the teaching of the *Republic*" (79).[17] In the third lecture, Lampert's claim is less sweeping: via the Idea of the Good, Socrates "moves toward" the monotheism of Zalmoxis (90).

Regarding the *Charmides*, Lampert offers a final brilliant twist regarding the relatively long discussion between Socrates and Critias about moderation (80). Critias, it seems, had previously learned from Socrates "a view that would eventually turn him into a notorious Athenian criminal, a most immoderate sophist and tyrant in the Athenian civil war." Learning in the *Charmides* that he had corrupted Critias, Socrates had "another powerful reason for altering his teaching."

Socrates doesn't here convey the allegedly healing words. For that, we turn again to the *Republic* (81). Offering very clever analyses of the passages where Odysseus is mentioned or alluded to, Lampert develops the resemblance between Socrates and him as founders. Almost every reader is excited by the dialogue's final discussion of Odysseus, in the myth of Er. Once souls have completed a thousand-year cycle of reward or punishment, there is a lottery that determines choices for their next round of life on earth (memories of prior experiences are erased before the reincarnation begins). Although the soul of Odysseus 'by chance' received the last pick while Er was observing, things worked out splendidly: 'from memory of its former labors it had recovered from love of honor,' and it finally found a life (overlooked by the other souls), the 'life of a private man who minds his own business' (82). I had always assumed that, by choosing a life like Socrates', this soul chose a life that would center on learning rather than leading. I am now tempted, however, by Lampert's thesis that the reincarnated Odysseus would be minding "the business of philosophy and everything it entails to protect itself and advance itself" (82).

The above-mentioned long speeches by Glaucon and Adeimantus,

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16 Zalmoxis and the Getae are discussed in 4.93-96 of Herodotus's *Histories*. Lampert exaggerates in saying that the Getae "effectively" resisted the Persians (79); according to 4.93, they were hubristic and the Persians quickly enslaved them.

17 Lampert later reminds us that, on the same night that Socrates et al. were discussing and debating in the Piraeus, the Athenians were "themselves importing a foreign god, Bendis" (83).

which prompted Socrates to found "the city in speech" with them, clearly convey certain teachings of the Greek enlightenment (84). They were explicitly reviving the cynical moral perspectives that Thrasymachus had trumpeted in Book One. As Lampert observes, Thrasymachus is in effect a second-generation sophist who was "much less restrained or moderate" than Protagoras (85). As Strauss "showed beautifully," however, Socrates "makes a special effort to win Thrasymachus as his *friend*." Lampert adds he wasn't motivated by hatred in speaking harshly to Socrates in Book One. He was instead seeking "to gain an advantage over Socrates with the young men." Lampert's takeaway deserves an "A" for imagination:

> Socrates' strategic aim in the *Republic* is to persuade Thrasymachus that he can best serve his own advantage by adopting Socrates' strategy for philosophy. Speaking to the young men, his prospective customers and clients, as a friend of Socrates would entail that Thrasymachus *adopt a version* of Socrates' moderate strategy for philosophy.

Socrates, finally, hoped he would succeed better in reforming Glaucon and Adeimantus—Plato's older brothers—than he had with Alcibiades.

Lampert proceeds to summarize the three new "anti-Homeric teachings foreign to the Greek tradition" that might heal such young men. Regarding the soul, Socrates demoted the competitive and honor-craving *thymos* (spirit), also arguing that the soul was immortal and would be rewarded or punished in the afterlife (87-88). Second, he conveyed "a new teaching on *knowing and being*." Lampert adds, correctly, that Strauss was "almost outspoken" when mocking the obscurity in the theory of ideas. More importantly, Strauss allegedly demonstrated that "the doctrine is an exoteric teaching that can easily persuade non-philosophers who have been raised to believe in glorious gods like Nike and Dike, the gods of victory and justice." Lampert here builds cleverly on points he made regarding the *Republic*'s "ministerial poetry." Although Socrates' prime interlocutors had become skeptical of Homer's gods, their "learned skepticism . . . leaves them with a concept of what a god is that prepares them for Socrates' teaching on the ideas" (89). Lampert nonetheless asserts that the "ideas" can teach readers a lot about Socrates' "genuine insight into human perception and cognition, or sensing and understanding" (89). The third anti-Homeric teaching is the moralistic reform of Homer's gods, as Lampert's first lecture elaborated.

Lampert then offers compelling observations to accentuate Plato's ambitions in the *Republic*. On the day that "numberless" Athenians returned to Athens to report on the "all-night spectacle" that introduced the new goddess (Bendis), Socrates returned to convey what he had introduced "privately on the same night in the same place and now introduces to whoever wants to hear it in Athens" (recall the discussion above of "yesterday"). Because Socrates didn't direct his massive narration to any specific individual[s], Plato in effect has him

orating "to anyone and everyone." Lampert then provides another scintillating takeaway: although the introduction of Bendis did nothing that changed "the ultimate fate of Athens," Socrates' innovations ended up "changing the fate of philosophy in Athens and, ultimately, in changing the fate of Western civilization." As Nietzsche put it (in *The Birth of Tragedy*), Socrates was 'the one vortex and turning point of so-called world history' (91).

Lampert concludes the lecture by relating Nietzsche to Plato and Homer. He starts by noting the obvious point that Book Ten of the *Republic* assesses Homer more explicitly and completely (91) than Books Two and Three had done (they focused on Achilles' shortcomings as a role model for the guardians). As sketched above, Lampert innovates by highlighting similarities between Socrates and Odysseus. Odysseus ended up killing the 108 suitors of his wife (Penelope). As interpreted by Lampert, Odysseus attempted to "establish a new order politically and religiously." Despite the virtues of his son, Telemachus, he isn't as outstanding as his father, so the political "succession" Odysseus sought required "a more democratic order to be ruled by Telemachus and his associates like Eumaeus, the loyal pig farmer." Homer, Lampert adds, portrayed the suitors as "wicked," so that killing them will appear just, and Odysseus is here assisted by Athena (92). Socrates, correspondingly, learned from Homer that he must kill Homer—and make Homer "seem to deserve it." Homer had made Zeus responsible for human evil, and Homer was ignorant regarding the ideas and the soul's immortal destiny. Between the lines, however, Socrates "honors Homer as his own teacher" (cf. *Republic* 595b-c, 607a)—who actually "*taught* that he must be killed off by the coming wise man whoever he was, whenever he came, whatever he brought." And by "teaching new gods." Lampert asserts—even more persuasively—that Nietzsche in turn "made every effort to *kill off Plato*." More controversially, Lampert adds that Nietzsche did so "with Plato's permission." Lampert maintains (here and elsewhere) that the teaching of the "exoteric" Plato "ultimately led to a cultural disaster" (93). After quoting the *BGE* preface praise of Plato as "the most beautiful growth of antiquity," Lampert effuses that the esoteric Plato is "immortal, living on forever in the underworld of the wise" (93-94), even though Plato "must" now be "supplanted by Nietzsche."

LECTURE FOUR:
Socrates Becomes Socrates (97-128)

The second Plato lecture briefly recapitulates Lampert's *How Socrates Became Socrates*, which hadn't yet been published. The three dialogues this lecture examines share a "formal similarity" as the only dialogues narrated/reported by someone other than Socrates (97). Plato thus invites readers to uncover the "logical sequence" that conveys Socrates' "progress in thought from the *Phaedo*, which includes discussion of a pioneering step taken by the very young Socrates, to the *Parmenides*, where he learns that his innovation was fatally flawed, to the

Symposium, where he conveys "the point of deepest insight that a philosopher can attain." Motivated readers, consequently, can figure out "how *Socrates became Socrates*"—the alleged 'vortex' of world history. Plato's "calculated presentation of the exoteric Socrates," in other words, is "intended to lead his most interested reader to the esoteric Socrates" (98). Plato, correspondingly, is "a master of artful writing who teaches in the way Socrates taught, that is, without saying everything."

Regarding the chronology here (though not with the three dialogues his first lecture examined), Lampert credits both Strauss and Benardete for noting the sequence. Going beyond them, however, he will be "linking in detail the three events that Plato arranged" (99). The contrasting account the *Apology* provides—in Socrates' "only public speech to all of Athens"—regarding the Socratic turn, Lampert plausibly maintains, is essentially a "*politic* speech." The subservience Socrates here displays toward the oracle at Delphi, correspondingly, is "a *mythically* true account," while Lampert will elaborate the "*non-mythic* account" (100).

The *Phaedo*, still famous for the denouement in which Socrates drinks the hemlock and dies, is narrated by the disciple Phaedo to a group of Pythagoreans in a city far from Athens, perhaps suggesting that existing Pythagorean schools could help spread the Socratic teaching. Although Pythagoreans believed the soul was immortal, the two young ones in attendance (Kebes and Simmias**)** expressed doubts to Socrates about that proposition (70a-b, 85c, 101). We read that Socrates paused (95e) before articulating a key response to Kebes. He proceeded to deliver "the argument he knows will be *the last argument of his life* because the sun is sinking and he has to drink the poison at sundown." To explain the pause, Socrates says that Kebes was forcing him to address 'the cause concerning generation and destruction as a whole.' That question, Lampert adds, concerns "the comprehensive topic of philosophy, the *cause* at work in the whole of nature, the whole of becoming" (102).

As is well known, the *Phaedo* portrays the very young philosopher as a pre-Socratic focused on "natural" causes. That Socrates was perplexed until he "heard about" the teleological teachings of Anaxagoras, for whom "Mind" was the "ordering cause" for natural changes (97c, 102-3). When he read the books of Anaxagoras, however, he concluded that even Anaxagoras relied upon "natural causes" rather than mind (98b-c). All this suggests that Anaxagoras had used "exoteric and salutary teaching to cover his own esoteric naturalism" (103) as Lampert elaborates in his second Plato book.

In the *Phaedo*, Socrates proceeds to stress the limits of natural causes, e.g., because it is evaluative opinions (belonging to Socrates and other Athenians)—rather than 'bones and sinews' (99a)—that explain why he was in prison awaiting execution. He proceeds to sketch the famous 'second sailing in search of the cause' (103): a "turn away from the things to be explained" toward "the speeches or accounts that human beings use to talk and think"

about them. Socrates then invokes 'the form (*eidos*, idea) of the cause with which I've busied myself' (100b), which illustrated "the *ideas* or *forms* that he has been talking about ever since." Socrates, furthermore, then invokes the ideas (e.g., of the Good and the Beautiful) to prove the soul's immorality (105)—and placates Kebes, who can now accept Socrates' death.

For additional details about the timing of Socrates' education, Lampert examines the *Parmenides*, which Plato set at a "famous moment" in philosophical history, 450 at the great Panathenaia (127a, 105). Though only around 19, Socrates "had thought through the whole history of Greek philosophy before him and arrived at his own novel solution to the problem of cause." Plato's manipulation of the setting suggests how this ancient conversation would have been preserved. The dialogue's narrator is named Cephalus, one of the 'men of Clazomenae,' a Greek city in Asia Minor. Cephalus had sailed across the Aegean sea to Athens to "find out if *the one person* who *might have memory* of that conversation is still able to remember what was said about 60 years ago." Lampert, drawing again on Planeaux, infers that the journey and the subsequent conversation would have taken place around 390 B.C.E. The interested parties from Clazomenae hoped to find a second-order recounting based on what a man named Pythodorus had heard directly in 450, memorized, and later shared with Antiphon, the half-brother of Glaucon and Adeimantus (106). Antiphon displayed no interest in repeating what he had heard from Pythodorus (127a), and all the interlocutors were dead by 390, but the visitors from Clazomenae persuaded Antiphon to share what he recalled (106-7).

Invoking the transcendent and fixed ideas, the young Socrates boldly attempted to refute the views of old Parmenides and his disciple Zeno. According to Lampert, Socrates had "no argument" that could defend the ideas against the objections Parmenides presented.[18] At the end of his critique, Parmenides says this:

> Only a *naturally gifted man* could learn that there is a certain kind and beinghood in itself for each thing; and only a *still more wondrous person* will discover all these things and be able to teach someone else to be able to judge them clearly and sufficiently for himself (135a-b).

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18 Although I have rarely encountered anything baffling in Lampert's writings, I was unable to fathom what his *How Socrates Became Socrates* book (University of Chicago Press, 2021) conveys about Parmenides' arguments that allegedly defeated Socrates' theory. In its *Parmenides* chapter, indeed, Lampert draws heavily on what Benardete had written in "Plato's *Parmenides*: A Sketch," which was published in *The Archaeology of the Soul: Platonic Readings of Ancient Poetry and Philosophy*, edited by Ronna Burger and Michael Davis (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2012), 229-243. Although Lampert cites both the chapter and the collection, he fails to indicate that the latter houses the former, so I have done so here.

Lampert suggests that Socrates had already made "the fundamental step of philosophy and learned for himself that things have *natures*, that each thing belongs to a *kind*, a natural kind," as suggested by 'idea' (this perspective on the ideas is clearly indebted to Strauss). In addition, Lampert suspects that Parmenides was challenging Socrates to become the above-sketched "wondrous" individual (108). Lampert then quotes a long passage in which Parmenides attempts to encourage Socrates:

> if someone . . . after focusing on all these problems and others still, shall *deny* that there are ideas of the beings and will not distinguish a certain idea of each single thing, wherever he turns he'll understand nothing, since he does not allow that there is an ever-same idea for each of the beings. And so he will entirely destroy the power of dialogue or dialectics. But you seem to me only too aware of this (135b-c).

Lampert offers this pitch for the ideas: "If things are to be understood at all, then each thing must have its idea, must be an instance of its own kind. It must have a nature. And furthermore, that nature must in some sense be knowable" (109).

After pointing out that Cephalus had identified the men of Clazomenae as 'quite the philosophers' (126b, 109), Lampert poignantly infers that without them the story would have died. He adds other humbling inferences. Despite the deep influence Socrates presumably had on Adeimantus and Glaucon four decades earlier in 429 (the dramatic date of the *Republic*), the *Parmenides* implies that Antiphon's brothers had no "real interest in this story of the young Socrates: in all those years they never bothered to ask their brother to tell them the story" (110). The Clazomenae men, fortunately, were so eager to learn "how Socrates *became* Socrates" that they crossed the Aegean based on a rumor that someone in Athens could enlighten them. Regarding these pivotal but "nameless latecomers from abroad," Lampert adds, Plato apparently implies that what he preserves in this dialogue is "only for the passionately interested few, nameless future travelers from afar, potential philosophers willing to expend a lot of time and effort to learn what even close associates of Socrates do not need to know." So "the essential esoteric Socrates is embedded in the preserved conversations of the exoteric Socrates" (111), which can "continue to train" individuals like Plato's brothers in "the edifying, moral teaching with which philosophy will be identified and which they will believe" (111-12). Successors to the Clazomenae men, by contrast, will strive to understand what Socrates has "esoterically sheltered"—while attempting to "test" and "judge" the views they unearth (112).

Given the chronological linkage of the *Phaedo* (which sketches the young Socrates' account of the ideas) and the *Parmenides*, Lampert highlights that Socrates, in the final argument of his life, "teaches young Pythagoreans the

very view of the ideas that he himself, 50 years earlier, learned from Parmenides was rationally indefensible" (113). As Lampert proceeds to remind us, Socrates "repeatedly calls his last argument using the ideas, *the safe view*, the view his young audience can *trust*; it is the view he encourages them even *to shout* whenever anyone argues for a contrary view."[19] Like what the *Republic* teaches about the ideas, the *Phaedo* "belongs to political philosophy as a safe view that makes philosophy publicly defensible as morally trustworthy. It is a part of philosophic poetry, part of what Strauss called ministerial poetry" (113).

To get a better handle on how the mature Socrates approached "the serious philosophical problem" regarding nature and causes, Lampert turns to the *Symposium*.

His captivating account draws heavily on Strauss's posthumously published course transcript[20] and the interpretive essay Benardete appended to his 1986 *Symposium* translation. It is the only dialogue "named for its occasion," that occasion being "a *drinking party* at which wine loosens tongues," and the dialogue ultimately reveals "a secret about the gods and what they know" (114). Alcibiades plays a prominent role, and he was widely reviled in Athens because he was suspected of profaning its religious mysteries in 416. The Plato-directed chronology here is complex, and Planeaux concludes that its frame is 399, just before the trial of Socrates. The same year included the famous trial of Andokides. According to Lampert, both trials were part of "the purification of the city of Athens after the war with Sparta ended in 404 and after the civil war against the 30 Tyrants. . . . a time of fervent religious purification to which Socrates fell victim" (115). Compared to the Delphic mission Socrates mythically touted in the *Apology*, the *Symposium* reveals how Socrates really became wise.

The party took place shortly after the host Agathon won the tragedy contest, and "all Athenians would know that his victory occurred in 416." That was also the year their religious mysteries had been profaned by "revealing the secret core of Athenian religion"; Strauss focuses on "a profaning of different mysteries, the mysteries of what a philosopher is and what a philosopher can know." As Lampert will elaborate, Socrates' speech at the drinking party "opens for inspection the most hidden truths about philosophy that Plato will ever reveal, an unveiling of the mystery of Socrates' being as a philosopher that is at the same time an unveiling of the mystery of being itself" (116). Although no convention or law prohibits its disclosure, "the genuine mystery of nature always withdraws from articulation, resists being put into words." The *Symposium* nevertheless "suggests that to a degree, or in a way, that mystery can be divined." Not surprisingly, the unveiling is "itself mysterious, true to the

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19 Socrates invokes safety at *Phaedo*, 100e, 101d, 105b, and 105c. My best guess is that, regarding the shouting, Lampert was drawing upon 77e-78a, where Socrates encourages Kebes to "sing" certain "incantations."

20 *Leo Strauss on Plato's Symposium*, edited by Seth Benardete (University of Chicago Press, 2001).

hidden ways of nature" (117).

Regarding the Plato-generated chronology, Socrates ends up recounting a lesson he'd apparently learned around 440 (when he was roughly 30, and clearly older than the stages suggested by the *Parmenides* and the *Phaedo*). And that implies that he had completed his "*philosophic* education" before the *Protagoras* shows him "first mounting the public stage" in 434. So the 440 setting also implies that this education was completed before the political-philosophy education Plato portrays in *Protagoras, Charmides*, and *Republic* (117).

At the 416 party, when Socrates was roughly 53, he issues this famous proclamation: 'I claim to have expert knowledge of nothing but erotics' (177d). The guests, Lampert helpfully maintains, were "among the most sophisticated knowers in highly sophisticated Athens. . . . the most distinguished audience that Plato will ever show us for a speech by Socrates." Despite the party setting, furthermore, they speak more than they drink, and they dismiss the flute girls (118).

Apart from the drunken Alcibiades, who arrives later, each interlocutor delivers a speech about eros, and Socrates speaks last. Socrates begins by dissecting the view of Eros that Agathon had just given. And Socrates brings Agathon to *aporia,* to "admitting that he does not know what he thought he knew and had talked about so beautifully" (118). Socrates then mentions that he himself "was once put in that same state of neediness by a wise teacher [Diotima] who then led him, with the help of his own persistent questioning, to genuine knowledge of eros." Lampert adds, quite reasonably, that Socrates' speech to "everyone present" was especially directed at Agathon, "that brilliant young writer of tragedy who had just won the prize." But Socrates in effect hints at a greater prize: the possibility of Agathon's grasping on his own, after sophisticated investigation and questioning, "the true understanding of eros that he wrongly thought he already had" (119).

Diotima had begun by refuting a view held then by Socrates and now by Agathon: "that Eros is beautiful and good and wise." In challenging the implied binary regarding wisdom and ignorance, Diotima initially highlighted 'correct opinion' (202a) as an intermediate condition. As Lampert proceeds to explain, the philosopher, being neither wise nor ignorant, is passionately "*driven* to remedy his lack of wisdom" and "occupies the between *erotically*" (119-20). Lampert reminds us that in the *Parmenides*, Socrates' speech began where "the extremes were the ideas and the particulars, or we could say, pure permanence and pure flow." The *Symposium*, correspondingly, will later show how philosophy, "driven erotically, can best think the reality that lies between those abstractions of permanence and flow, the reality that the philosopher in fact *is* as erotic, *is* as one particular in the totality of particulars." The philosopher, in other words, "can come to know by knowing himself" (120).

The next lesson Diotima taught Socrates is that Eros is "something between a god and a mortal" and has the "power of *ferrying*" between them.

To Lampert, Diotima "seems to imply that the power of eros is constantly generating mortal approximations of immortality." In response to Socrates' asking who Eros's father and mother were, Diotima presents an explicit myth, subsequently bolstered by reasoning (120). At a divine feast, *Poros* (Resource), a guest who was the son of Intelligence, ended up coupling with *Penia* (Poverty), who was there to beg. Lampert here channels Strauss's "main conclusion" about the *Symposium*. "Plotting Poverty" knew what she lacked and acted to get it. Poverty, consequently, is *resourceful*; she does not lack intelligence. Strauss infers that Eros 'resembles only his mother.' In Lampert's words, "Eros springs from eros and eros results in eros." Citing George Dunn, Lampert says eros is "always coming into being as a result of its own activity and always slipping out of being as a result of its self-expenditure, its dying away in its expressing itself" (121). Citing Benardete, Lampert adds that eros is a 'self-aware desire' whose "deep structure" always "disappears into the concrete experience that it enables"; in "being what it is," it is "dynamic and directed out beyond itself," as Penia desired to procreate with Resource. In sum, eros is "always *dynamic*, *relational*, and *temporal*"; backward toward its origins and forward toward its outcomes (122), eros is desire inherently directed to "fulfillment or satisfaction," which in turn "always drains away and revives seeking fulfillment" (122-23). Responding to Socrates' suggestions that fulfilment lies in "the happiness of the good's being one's own forever," Diotima ends up defining the fulfillment of eros as a "begetting in the beautiful" (206b), and that fulfillment is never permanent. Recalling Socrates' above-quoted claim about expertise, we can infer that the erotic character of philosophic self-knowledge "extends out to the whole of what is as erotic" (123). In Strauss's words: 'Eros, we can say, is the heart of coming into being and perishing. Eros, we can say, is the nature of nature.'[21] To Lampert, Diotima thus anticipated Nietzsche by suggesting an ontology built on "the sovereignty of becoming." Lampert then formulates another takeaway that I would celebrate: "It is a thing worthy of wonder and of gratitude that the totality has an intelligible structure that can be known by humans existing within it" (124).

Reviewing the internal chronology of the three dialogues about the education of Socrates, Lampert claims that Socrates, despite his 'second sailing' turn to speeches about the human things, did not abandon "the question of *cause* concerning generation and destruction as a whole" (124). In the final *Symposium* stage, furthermore, Socrates "solves the problem of cause by resolving the problem set by Parmenides": "what *is* lies in a *between* between pure flow and the pure fixity or permanence of the ideas; everything that *is* has the dynamic, relational, temporal character of *eros*." Referencing the Delphic command to "know thyself," which Socrates regularly quoted, Lampert again touts the philosopher's straddling—between ignorance and wisdom—as a guide to the

21 This quotation appears in *Leo Strauss on Plato's Symposium*, 196.

"erotic between-ness of all things." In other words, all beings "exist in a way that is similar to the way that the highest, the most intellectual/spiritual being exists" (125).

After recalling the profanation-related chronology baked into the *Symposium*, Lampert suggests that if *we* put Socrates on trial and "test what he is saying," we too can discover that Socrates did justice to "the being of beings"—in a manner that is "itself hard to know but knowable." Unlike the criminals (perhaps including Alcibiades) who profaned the Athenian mysteries, he "treated the genuine mysteries appropriately: Socrates provided a way to be *initiated* into the mysteries, a way that initiates into the true secrets of nature those who pay him the closest attention." Recall how Socrates initially gave Agathon "the gift of knowing that if he was ever to know what eros is he had to begin again." And Socrates would become his Diotima (126). So Socrates "prepares an initiation" into the deepest mysteries, and Plato as author makes Socrates, "the instrument of Agathon's possible initiation, available for all future Agathons, for you and me."

To conclude his Plato lectures, Lampert again illuminates philosophical poetry by exploring how knowing spawns making. After leading Socrates to the crucial insight about eros and being, Diotima concludes her teaching with a long speech about a ladder. In Lampert's summary, she describes what happens at the peak as "both *a seeing* and *a doing*": the climber "*beholds* or *sees* perfect beauty" but also "*gives birth* or engages in a kind of *making* or *poetizing* in the presence of the beautiful." Transitioning to his lectures on Nietzsche, Lampert again quotes Strauss's claim that will to power 'takes the place' of Platonic eros (127) and in turn engenders eternal return as a "poeticizing of the new highest ideal." In "becoming themselves," Lampert adds, philosophers "become akin." But their doctrines can differ radically because "a teaching must fit its times, must be ministerial in an effective way that depends on a true understanding of the times," which themselves regularly change. Hence the "warring opposition" between Plato and Nietzsche. For the new political theology/philosophy to blossom, "all 108 suitors must die."

I'll conclude my discussion of Lampert's Plato with a few general reflections that highlight Strauss and his legacy. Strauss demonstrated that Plato was vastly more complex and subtle than either historicists or Platonists acknowledge, an approach further advanced by Joseph Cropsey, Allan Bloom, Christopher Bruell, Thomas Pangle, Catherine Zuckert, David Bolotin, Benardete, and other Straussians. Some of them, furthermore, have contributed to a Plato revival by producing meticulous English translations of most of the dialogues.

Lampert presents a vastly longer version of his revolutionary approach in the two Plato books of his that he mentions: *How Philosophy Became Socratic* (on *Republic*, *Charmides*, and *Protagoras*) and *How Socrates Became Socrates* (on *Phaedo*, *Parmenides,* and *Symposium*). His approach, I would argue, puts additional

nails in the coffins of the literalist interpreters—including Bertrand Russell, Karl Popper, the Manuels (in *Utopian Thought in the Western World*), Hannah Arendt, Sheldon Wolin, Christopher Bobonich, and most "Platonists"—along with the historicists who prioritize theories about when Plato *wrote* various dialogues. In two other respects, however, Lampert drifts towards other types of historicism. In both of his lectures, Lampert works with interior clues to argue that Plato sketched how Socrates' thoughts developed over time—and how they responded to larger political and theological developments in ancient Athens.[22] Strauss and some of his followers may have thought similarly, but they certainly haven't broadcast that, perhaps because they think "our times" would fare better if scholars opposed Nietzsche's deadly teachings, particularly the sovereignty of becoming, which includes the death of God. I lack the wisdom to adjudicate this dispute, but it provides a natural segue to Lampert's two lectures on Nietzsche.

LECTURE FIVE:
Nietzsche Becomes Nietzsche (131-63)

Unlike Strauss and Plato, Nietzsche conspicuously made "his own becoming" a theme. After finishing *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, "the two greatest books of his maturity," he wrote new forewords to his prior books. In 1888, furthermore, while attempting to write the "decisive, history-making book" that he never completed, he published the autobiographical *Ecce Homo*. In the book he regarded as his most important, finally, he strove to show Zarathustra's "becoming," which in Lampert's view was "a poeticized version" of his own becoming (132).

According to Lampert, Plato and Rousseau were the philosophers Nietzsche "most criticizes." Although he held them "most responsible for what Western philosophy and Western culture had become in his own time," he suggests (in *Human, All Too Human*, §408) that he belongs with them as a top-tier thinker along with three other pairs: Epicurus and Montaigne, Goethe and Spinoza, Pascal and Schopenhauer. Lampert proceeds to convey a characteristic twist. "Working to become *wholly free in his thinking*," Nietzsche "takes his *standard of action* from the history of great thinkers and actors who have determined the spiritual and intellectual course of the West." So they are "the standard by which he determines his own doings and he knows that their doings determined the history of the West" (134). I would have replaced "knows" with "believes" or "thinks." What would it take to "know" that a few dozen books "determined the history of the West"?

When describing Machiavelli as the founder of modernity, Strauss is very bold, but less sweeping than Lampert. By claiming that Machiavelli was

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22 As a referee commented helpfully, interpreters who are "working with interior clues . . . planted by the author" are *resisting* the historicist tendency to understand authors "better than they understood themselves."

"the first philosopher who attempted to force chance, to control the future by embarking on . . . a campaign of propaganda,"[23] Strauss reinforces his prominent thesis that pre-modern thinkers, starting with Plato, stood out for the priority they accorded to understanding or contemplation. Lampert elsewhere argues that Strauss downplayed both the ancient commitment to changing the world and the modern commitment to interpreting it. Be that as it may, I agree with Lampert that Nietzsche aimed to match the scale of the transformations that he traced to Plato et al.

Lampert proceeds to illuminate passages in *Ecce Homo* and (especially) *Beyond Good and Evil* that document Nietzsche's recognition of exotericism (135). Drawing deftly on *BGE* 30, which potently relates knowledge to tragedy and suffering, Lampert poses a gripping question: "Is it time for a new teaching that does not lie about suffering by inventing or endorsing some comedy of a purpose to existence that gives suffering meaning?" Quoting a notebook entry from 1888, Lampert asserts that the philosophic tradition of "exoteric noble lying comes to a self-conscious end with Nietzsche" (137). As previously mentioned, I think Lampert strives to be relentlessly honest and lucid. I hope it is by now obvious that his writings are vastly more accessible and comprehensible than Nietzsche's. As previously discussed, something like exotericism lives on for Lampert's Nietzsche in the ways that he wanted his thinking to generate "art" or "philosophic poetry." Lampert's last two lectures focus on this theme (138).

According to Lampert, Nietzsche's first five books (published from 1872 – 1876) placed him in the "service" of Schopenhauer and Wagner, but in the summer of 1876 he made a "decisive turn" to take his own path and free his mind from prejudices. Echoing points about self-knowledge in Socrates, Lampert says that Nietzsche's turn centered on studying the human soul "with knowledge of his own soul," but also on studying the history of philosophy to understand the sources of general "bias and prejudices" (139). And that required "using all the resources of *modern science* . . . which had made solid progress with strict methods of gaining and communicating knowledge." With his 1881 book *Daybreak*, his campaign to free the mind also became a long-lasting 'campaign against morality' (140). On the back cover of the first edition of *The Gay Science*, published in the summer of 1882, one encounters this announcement: "With this book a series of writings by Friedrich Nietzsche comes to its end, the writings whose common goal it is to erect a new image and ideal of the free mind." Nietzsche, adds Lampert, would then aim at "*showing what the free mind can come to know*, showing the truth that the freed mind can rightly *tie* itself to" (141).

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23 Leo Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1959), 46. He adds that Machiavelli was inspired by the impact of Christian "propaganda" on "many generations of many nations" (45); pre-modern philosophers "of all persuasions" had never even dreamed of "controlling the future fate of human thought in general" (46).

To explain these discoveries, which Nietzsche elaborated in his later books, Lampert focuses on the notebook he began in 1881, which was a crucial source for *The Gay Science*. Lampert concedes that Nietzsche "never intended that anyone ever read" the notebook in which he first laid out the new discoveries. His notebooks, however, manifest exceptional quality, in part because he trained himself to organize his thinking during long walks; because of his terrible eyesight, after 1886-1887 he could only read or write for about 90 minutes without experiencing "extreme headaches" (142-43). Except for the very late ones, indeed, the notebooks were "very orderly, written in steady handwriting on almost every line of the lined pages" and filled with "polished paragraphs." In composing his later books, consequently, he would "organize and assemble these already coherent paragraphs into ordered themes and chapters, editing and rewriting the entries, adding and subtracting, until he had arranged the entries into whole chapters." Especially in the later books, furthermore, "each chapter is a disciplined sequence with a beginning, middle and end" (143).

The 1881 notebook builds on a key *Daybreak* challenge to the "prevailing morality" that exalted altruism. Nietzsche argued that "*all* human actions . . . are based on drives or passions that are in principle egoistic or self-serving," that every "seemingly altruistic action actually fulfilled a veiled or hidden egoistic drive." Lampert shares, very helpfully, a list of the compound terms the notebook used to describe what unites our diverse egoistic drives (Lampert will soon highlight how "will to power" came to be Nietzsche's preferred term for this phenomenon). The notebook typically described the "highest" drive as "*the passion for knowledge*," what Nietzsche "recognized as his own most powerful passion, a passion not categorically different from the other passions but the peak of the passions, the *geistigste*, the most intellectual/spiritual, the top of the rank order of the passions." The entries add that "within the individual soul the drives exist in a constant war with one another for *supremacy*, or for *rule*" (145).

Lampert proceeds to sketch how the notebook moves from uncovering the will to power in human drives to finding it in "all actions of all living beings" (145-46) and even in "all actions of all things" (recall *BGE* 36, discussed above). Psychology, in other words, expands to biology and then to physics.[24] Here is Lampert's helpful pitch for the will to power:

> what was basic was a desire to overcome; it was a force that reaches beyond itself and encounters the other in the form of *resistance*, and drives to overcome that resistance. And that other is not other in its essence; it too is a desire to overcome. So

24 At the end of *BGE*'s first chapter, in which he makes four references to the will to power, Nietzsche provocatively invites psychology to resume its status as "the queen of the sciences" (23).

> what is ultimately at work in all things is *force* that always exists within a *field* of forces (146).

He quickly proceeds to acknowledge that Nietzsche (in *BGE* 22) concedes that will to power is a 'weakening and limiting metaphor.'

The 1881 notebook also records Nietzsche's discovery of eternal return, making this the most important of the notebooks (148). Lampert proceeds to examine the *Sanctus Januarius* (Saint January) chapter/book of *The Gay Science*; he wrote this chapter only after deciding he would write *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to elaborate his 1881 discoveries.[25] In *Out of the seventh solitude* (§309), the chapter's central section, a 'wanderer' overcoming several obstacles faces "a final, unexpected crisis": thinking that his quest had finished, in '*Armida's garden*,' so that he could rest. The reference is obviously obscure, and Lampert explains it briefly: a certain Rinaldo was there "tempted to stop just short of his ultimate achievement, conquest or capture of the Holy City." Nietzsche is here warning his most rarefied readers not to falter before "discovering the central matter" (149), which he will intimate in the next section. In §310, "*Will and Wave*," Nietzsche presents a captivating metaphor about a wave's "secret" that he had grasped (149-50). In dissecting its implied ontology, which seems to conjure the will to power, Lampert notes that the draft version included a few words that elaborate the secret. The published version, in other words, "leaves it to *you* to figure out the secret of what you in your knowledge-seeking share with the waves crashing into the cliff and trying to force their way into every crack and corner of the cliff" (151).[26]

Both the notebook and the chapter enact the move (sketched above) from the ontology of will to power and introduce (for the first time) Nietzsche's radical "new ideal," eternal return (153). Drawing on points from Strauss's Nietzsche chapter, Lampert here builds to the conclusion that "fact" and "value" are connected in the way that "*understanding* the world" is connected to loving it.

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25 In *What a Philosopher Is: Becoming Nietzsche* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), a book published after he delivered the lectures, Lampert provides an intricate discussion of both "Saint January" and the 1881 notebook.

26 In *What a Philosopher Is*, Lampert explains 'the seventh solitude' as Nietzsche's "play" on the traditional image of bliss in seventh heaven (232). Based on *Gay Science* §308, which challenges the "special reader" driven to make his or her conscience (and all other drives) "an object of science" (231), the seventh solitude of §309 "appears as what a knower of conscience is ultimately driven to understand" (232); Nietzsche discovered the will to power after years of solitary investigation (237), and Armida's garden represents the "temptation" that a "comfortable skepticism" would present (233). Lampert also notes that Rinaldo (according to *Gerusalemme Liberata*, a 1575 epic poem that many operas later drew upon) was the leader of the First Crusade (232). Armida was apparently a sorceress who abducted Rinaldo to her magical garden, where he escaped enchantment after his two companions appeared at the gate and persuaded him to depart: https://www.artic.edu/artworks/16485/rinaldo-and-armida-in-her-garden.

And Lampert praises Strauss for calling that (on *SPPP*, 181) Nietzsche's 'relapse into Platonism' (156).

Nietzsche introduced eternal return at the end of "Saint January," the final chapter of the 1882 *Gay Science* and its only named chapter (he added a fifth chapter in 1887). For this and other reasons, Lampert maintains that the introduction was "highly prominent." Indeed, Nietzsche ended the book and the chapter "in a *January* way, a way that fits a new year." After propelling readers with several "important" sections that summarize his take on morality, §340 sketches "what is ending, the core teaching of the old year." That section (three from the end), is *The dying Socrates*. For Lampert's Nietzsche, Socrates is "ultimately responsible for the teaching that came to dominate western civilization, the teaching that life can only be suffered and that humans need to be redeemed from a life of suffering by a healing god." And now that teaching is dying. §341, which unveils the new teaching of eternal return, is titled *The heaviest weight* (157). Nietzsche had addressed the waves as 'you' in §310, and §341 personalizes by asking 'you' to consider how you would react to a visiting 'demon' who revealed that you would endlessly relive your exact life (157-58). After sketching two extremely divergent reactions that you might have, based on your assessment of your life, Nietzsche drops the demon and speculates about how you would react if his thesis 'gained power over you': it 'would transform you . . . and perhaps crush you.' Lampert infers that eternal return is "a *selecting* thought, a *separating* thought depending on who you are" (158).[27]

The last section of the chapter (§342) introduces Zarathustra as someone who was preparing to descend from the mountains with a new teaching. As Lampert observes, this is an ending "no reader could possibly understand and that every reader would find surprising and questionable" (158-59)—even though a few might know that Zarathustra was the Persian prophet who was "the founding teacher of transcendence and of an afterlife of reward for the good and punishment for the evil." Many later readers, though, would know that this section in effect launches the book Nietzsche was planning to write—"to present the teaching of eternal return" (159).

Lampert proceeds to discuss how Nietzsche discusses his two "great discoveries" in *Zarathustra* and *BGE*. In Part One of the former, the will to power appears just once, but it is used "to illuminate what lies behind 'the greatest power on earth,' morality." Zarathustra explains it in Part Two [in "On Self-Overcoming"], but only for 'you wisest' (159-60), for whom it underlies their 'will to truth.' Before explaining it, Nietzsche presents "The Dance Song," where Zarathustra "abandons his skeptical 'Wild Wisdom' who had maintained

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27 As a referee reminded me, the title of §341 is literally "The greatest heavyweight" (*Das größte Schwergewicht*), and the German *Dämon* conjures the ancient Greek *daimōn*, a spirit that mediates between humans and gods. §341 memorably adds that the prospect of eternal repetition would "lie upon" your actions (*Handeln*) as the greatest *Schwergewicht*.

that life or being is unfathomable." He "embraces instead his true love, Life herself who suggests to him she is *not unfathomable*"—that she "can be *fathomed*, that she has a character or way that can be understood."[28]

Zarathustra ends his speech to the wisest by saying, 'There is many a house yet to be built.' According to Lampert, the will to power "needs to be known only by those with the most powerful passion to know." It is they who will join Zarathustra to "build the house yet to be built; they will construct the teachings that will house future human beings, or be incorporated into future human beings." Eternal return is thus "the *teaching for all* that will house future humanity." First comes "*insight* for a few," which then spawns "a *teaching* for all" (160).

BGE, as sketched above, follows a similar chronology. Lampert now relays Strauss's claim that its first chapter's claims about the will to power seem dogmatic. Chapter Two ("The Free Mind"), however, presents an argument for its being "the comprehensive truth," but that argument is "only for his special audience of freed minds he has been educating"—and he expects they'll initially balk by invoking God and the devil.[29] Eternal return, meanwhile, is presented as "the public teaching for everyone"—to ameliorate the death of God—in the religion chapter that follows. In the late work that Nietzsche had begun writing when his breakdown happened, he employed the same pattern: "the will to power would be a *truth* to be thought through by those driven to think whereas eternal return would be a *teaching* within which everyone could live their lives and celebrate their lives and celebrate the whole of life" (161-62). Here again, Lampert implies that Nietzsche—like Plato and Strauss—insisted that human beings can attain knowledge of innumerable things, even ontology, and that genuine philosophers are not attempting to impose their arbitrary preferences on their communities.

Before presenting a final sketch of how the will to power and Platonic eros are "close kin" as ontological insights, Lampert displays attractive humility: "Here we are at the highest and hardest. Here the limitations of language and of thinking and of *my* thinking are most evident." Both concepts, first of all, assert the "*sovereignty of becoming*." More specifically, both assert that *"becoming* is a surging and satisfying and surging again." And both add that in "that *ever-self-renewing activity* there is an internal directionality that aims at a kind of self-satisfaction." This "*discharging of energy or force*," furthermore, is "a reaching beyond itself that encounters the *other* as a discharging of force reaching beyond *itself*," so the discharging is "*relational*." The "total field of such relations," moreover, is "the *totality simply*, *all that is*."

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28 For Lampert's comprehensive analysis of the love triangle among Zarathustra, Wisdom, and Life, see *Nietzsche's Teaching: An Interpretation of* Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Yale University Press, 1986), 103-9.

29 See the discussion above of *BGE* 36-37.

Lampert concedes that Plato's language of *eros* is "attractive and affirmative, expressing the process in human terms that make it easily lovable" (162). Nietzsche, by contrast, had a "tough-minded resolve to avoid what he called 'word-tinsel' or verbal beautification, in favor of terminology that described the process more exactly though necessarily still inadequately" (recall *BGE* 22 on the "weakening and limiting metaphor"). Indeed, Nietzsche "became Nietzsche in a way similar to the way in which Socrates became Socrates. Genuine philosophers are genuine kin."

LECTURE SIX:
Nietzsche's Philosophic Poetry (167-99)

This is the last lecture Lampert delivered in Beijing. He begins by repeating what might have been his favorite sentence in Strauss (from the introduction to *Thoughts on Machiavelli*): "*The problem inherent in the surface of things and only in the surface of things is the heart of things*." I have always found this puzzling, and I cannot improve on the explanation Lampert here provides regarding great books:

> woven into the surface through their art of writing, was the heart of things, what the philosopher who composed that surface wanted *you* to follow into the heart of things. And the heart of things that Strauss discovered and wanted his careful readers to discover was what a philosopher always aims to discover, the truth, ultimately the truth of being or of what is, the ontological truth. We can discover that truth only with the most responsible and thorough skeptical method that tests what is mere belief in order to discover if anything can be known.

Strauss, furthermore, "showed that with good method, exegetical method that learns the philosophers' art of writing," we can "read our way" into the genuine ontological "heart" of Plato and Nietzsche (167).

In discussing how Nietzsche moved from the ontology of the will to power to "philosophic poetry, a teaching that can be lived" (167), this lecture starts with *BGE* 36. Here, just after the center of the chapter, Nietzsche addresses the epistemological skepticism, partly indebted to Kant, that represents the peak insight of the 'free minds,' including the 'friends' whom Nietzsche's earlier books had helped to train. In the chapter's central section (§34), Nietzsche clearly challenges the exaltation of skepticism. There follows a short—and manifestly quirky—section (§35) that Lampert quotes in its entirety (168):

> O Voltaire! O humaneness! O nonsense! There is something about 'truth,' about the *search* for truth; when a human being goes about it too humanely—'He seeks the true only to do the good'—I bet he finds nothing!

Voltaire was the hero of *Human, All Too Human* (1878), so Nietzsche now implies that modern skeptics err by assuming the true and the good align,

which excuses their "continued *belief* in modern virtue" regarding inequality and suffering. Skepticism, in other words, "gives permission to place morality above knowing" (169). Because Nietzsche proceeds to present (in §36) the only "argument" he himself makes on behalf of his will-to-power ontology, §34-35 signal why his times were "unripe" for that ontology. At the end of Zarathustra's only "argument for will to power," correspondingly, he asked only "*you wisest*" to "*talk* of this." In both books, the ontological argument is directed at "the most select audience." This, Lampert concludes (in effect channeling Strauss's pitch regarding "the surface"), is "the esoteric core of Nietzsche's thought however much it lies open on the page" (170). Recounting some of the passages I shared above from §36, Lampert stresses the hypothetical terminology they include, and infers an invitation to "suspend the view of classical modern physics (the physics of Descartes and Newton) that a *mechanics* of cause and effect is at work within a mechanistic world-whole." The alternative is to "view events in nature hypothetically as *will* events, events in which *will* is active." Needless to say, this supports the crucial hypothesis that "human beings are not essentially different from other living beings," one of Nietzsche's three deadly truths (171).[30]

As discussed above, both Lampert and Strauss cleverly explain the transition from §36 to the startling invocation of God and devil from Nietzsche's "friends" in §37. As Lampert returns to discuss Nietzsche's move from philosophy to philosophic poetry, he notes the small punctuational dash that ends §36 (172). Lampert now adds that the free minds who would be "shocked" by §36 are not "fully free" because they still wed the good to the true. In his second Strauss lecture, Lampert didn't elaborate the political stakes, but he does so here. If Nietzsche is correct about the will to power, his "friends" face a major obstacle: "their good of perpetual peace at the end of history in a paradise of equality of rights and the end of suffering is neither attainable nor true." Hence their recourse in §37 to 'popular' theological language. They react conventionally because "only that language can express their extreme feeling" (173).[31]

Again recalling Strauss's repeated claims that Nietzsche's new doctrine is 'a vindication of God' (173), Lampert eventually comments that the modern "free minds" friendly to Nietzsche (in the words of §58) 'no long even knew what religions are good for.' As Lampert notes, the religion chapter ends with two sections (§61-62) where Nietzsche argues that religions are needed in

30 By invoking "living beings," Lampert goes beyond Nietzsche's claim (in "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life") that there is no "cardinal distinction between man and animal." I would first offer the obvious rejoinder that no other animal discusses morality, mortality, ontology, skepticism, or the quest for truth. And given Nietzsche's notorious efforts to convey immense differences of "rank" among human beings, how could he deny there is a "cardinal" distinction between a prokaryotic bacterium and an average kindergartner? I concede that even bacteria constantly engage in an attenuated "dialogue" with reality; if they don't find nutrition, for example, they die.

31 For Lampert's longest discussion of *BGE* §36-37, see *Nietzsche's Task*, 84-91.

"any social order." Only religion, says Lampert, "can structure the daily life of a culture," and cultures "live on . . . incorporated beliefs that one takes in from the earliest age in the stories told to little children and reinforces in the rituals and festivals and customs that give meaning and structure to ordinary daily life." Paraphrasing from §62, he adds that religion, to be beneficial, "must be guided in the appropriate way" by philosophers; reason, in other words, "must rule the instinct to worship and adore" (176).

Lampert's lectures have three final sections devoted to "philosophic poetry"—in connection with eternal return, gods, and ecology.

After revisiting some above-discussed claims from the second Strauss lecture, Lampert expands his account of how Nietzsche moved from the nihilism that could easily follow God's death (§55) to the maximally affirming ethos of eternal return. In sketching how he escaped from the deepest pessimism, Nietzsche proclaims that he stands 'beyond good and evil and no longer . . . under the spell and delusion of morality.' And his eyes are now open to 'the ideal of the most high-spirited, alive, world-affirming human being' (177). Based on his claim (in §56) that he made this discovery 'without really meaning to' while 'driven by some enigmatic longing'—phrases that Lampert credits Strauss for emphasizing—Lampert infers that Nietzsche did not undertake his investigations to "discover a new ideal." He was instead driven by "the 'enigmatic longing' that is the need to understand." Lampert proceeds to offer the moving passage I previously quoted about the "affirmation of the world because the world makes the philosopher possible," which Lampert unearthed in §56's concluding invocation of *circulus vitiosus deus* (178).

'There is an important ingredient, not to say the nerve, of Nietzsche's 'theology' of which I have not spoken and shall not speak' (*SPPP*, 181). Lampert speculates helpfully about this odd passage from Strauss's chapter, suggesting that said 'nerve' is Nietzsche's "introduction of gods." Strauss thus "refuses to speak about the theological-political project that Nietzsche suggested could be the center of a future world" (179). Lampert, though, plunges ahead to dissect the 'tempter' god that Nietzsche celebrates in §295, the penultimate aphorism in *BGE*. Nietzsche here (after alluding to *The Birth of Tragedy*) proclaims himself to be 'the last disciple and initiate of the god Dionysos,' who is a philosopher. So 'even gods philosophize,' which contradicts claims by Plato and Diotima that the gods are "already wise" (180). Nietzsche again worries about his friends, who 'today . . . no longer like to believe in God and gods.' Elaborating what §295 adds here about 'the right moment,' Lampert emphasizes that those friends had only recently escaped the old "tyrannical" God (181).

By pairing Dionysos with Ariadne, §295 leaves *The Birth of Tragedy* behind. Lampert's Nietzsche doesn't "believe that humanity could go backward and reestablish the religion of Homer," so why did Nietzsche select this pair? According to Strauss, §295 presented Dionysos as a "super-Socrates" (*SPPP*, 175). But what does Ariadne add? If human beings indeed have a "natural

inclination to make into gods what we hold highest" (181), we would divinize life, as implied by eternal return. And life is "the constantly renewing cycle of being born and dying, being born through sexual reproduction and dying." Hence Dionysos and Ariadne, "who belong together in their difference; they are the war between the sexes and the love between the sexes." As a philosophizing god, Dionysos "is driven to understand." In "some more fundamental sense," however, Ariadne "already knows," as "*she* has the thread that leads out of the mystery at the heart of the labyrinth" (182). Invoking *BGE*'s opening hypothesis that 'truth is a woman,' Lampert elsewhere discusses how Ariadne provided both the sword Theseus used to kill the Minotaur and the thread that helped him escape the labyrinth.[32]

In the *Republic*, Socrates said the new theology could coexist with the already established religious institutions, i.e., "the practices and rituals, the song and dance" (427b-c), which could adapt to his innovations. For Nietzsche, however, there are no comparable institutions regarding Dionysos and Ariadne (182). Gods and the highest ideals, Lampert adds, "seem believable only when they have always already been believed, when they are the gods of the ancestors that we have known since childhood, and when we already know how to sing their praises and how to dance our gratitude." In *Ecce Homo* 4.1, Nietzsche distinguishes himself sharply from 'the founder of a religion.' So perhaps this is the advice he leaves to his friends:

> *recognize* the necessity of religion; *recognize* the universal naturalness of Dionysos and Ariadne as the gods of life: *recognize* that and leave it to the god-making instinct. The love of life will do what love does in human beings, prompt us to divinize, to make divine what we most love, life as reproduced through sexuality. Dionysos and Ariadne are the natural gods of human beings in love with life, and the natural human instinct to make gods will see to their rebirth (183).

Lampert proceeds to his final section: the philosophic poetry of ecology as "the human way of being on the earth." The obvious power of this poetry (compared to gods and eternal return) is that "an ethics of ecology or environmentalism is something that could be much more easily welcomed by a contemporary audience" (184). He initially reviews points from his second Strauss lecture about assigning limits to the conquest of nature. Strauss, however, was worried that the conquest of *human* nature could end philosophy by rejecting all rank and all suffering. Lampert adds that "suffering properly understood," e.g., as "the human struggle to attain the high," includes the "sacrificial . . . subordination of every drive to the drive for knowledge" (185). To extend the analysis to ecological themes, Lampert returns to what Nietzsche's

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32 Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task*, 292, 70-71.

1881 notebook said in criticizing the simplistic opposition between egoism and altruism (186-87). From remarks about living 'for the sake of the true' (188), Lampert perceives the prospect of habituating people to "the genuine reality of things that underlies I, you, and nature" (188-89).

Lampert's Nietzsche has "understood the process that made humans what we are, the molding process of history and culture that is based on the real drives that constitute us." Nietzsche crucially recognizes that we will "always be *the uneasy beings*, living the particular forms of suffering that our particular psychic and social orders of rank impose on us." Nietzsche does not aim to summon a utopia. Instead, he hopes that "the nihilism and turmoil at the end of the moral period" can, with his help, yield to "a better reorganization of the drives" that "fosters stronger and more noble specimens of the human species" (190).

The notebook ends up offering a new ideal emphasized with an "NB" (the Latin abbreviation of "Note Well"): 'No *possession* in the young to strive *to must have (müssen) or to want (wollen)*!: as well as no *prestige* for command over others—these two drives are *not to be developed* at all!' (190). To replace greed, possessiveness, and ambition, the paragraph offers this environmentally friendly alternative: '*Letting* us *be possessed* by the things (not by persons) and by the largest possible range of *true things*' (191). The notebook, consequently, shows how Nietzsche "learned to free himself from the false I-feeling of a separated, isolated, possessive I and had won the freedom to know the relatedness of all things." This developed along with "the desire to let the true things *be the things they are*" within himself. This philosopher's experience, which "culminated in knowing what is to be will to power and nothing else" in turned spawned his NB "task to educate the young in the new stage," in the *I-feeling* that ultimately wants "the natural things to be what they are in their continuous becoming and decaying, in their natural order of rank, and in all the other facets of their naturalness." Here again, Lampert reminds us, "insight into *what is* is followed by insight" into necessary action. The NB includes a final green statement: after we're possessed by the immense 'range of *true things*,' we 'become *farmland*' for them (192); corresponding '[*i*]*mages of existence*' will 'grow out of us,' and we would become 'the farmland that would bring forth such fruit.' In Lampert's summary, such images—echoing the *Symposium*'s emphasis on *poiein*—would "celebrate and let be what naturally is in its coming to be and passing away." Using the phrase I selected for my epigraph, he adds that "words and songs spring out of us by nature, generated by our fruitful soil" (194).[33]

Lampert proceeds to offer this compelling elaboration:

The new images of existence conceptualize the earth as the

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33 Lampert later states that this notebook's concluding account of the "I-feeling" is the very first "completed version of Nietzsche becoming Nietzsche" (197).

> natural home of humanity; biological science studies the interconnected web of life on the planet; political and social movements make ecology central to decision-making or, as Strauss words it, assign limits to the conquest of nature out of love of nature (194).

Plato's images were so influential because "they serve deep drives that are part of the human make-up." For Nietzsche, they were dying—deservedly—to be replaced by the "deep drives" Nietzsche illuminates, "affirmative drives" that clash with what Plato's "images of transcendence came to serve, negating drives of hatred and vengeance" (194-95). The new ideal, obviously, is not "an eternal fixity" but "the eternal return of ever-changing life just as it is." As previously mentioned, European modernity (for Nietzsche and Lampert) "carried forward secular versions of Christian virtues, the modern ideals of the end of suffering and equality of rights," and these were the primary current adversaries against which Nietzsche waged a spiritual "war" (195).

Dionysos and Ariadne "are not our judges; they don't punish or reward us; we don't have to bow down to them or beg them for favors." Instead, they resemble us (and other living things) by being male and female, "sexual, generative beings" that happen to be "far superior to us in their manliness and womanliness." So we should emulate or copy them as best we can, for they "lift us up by being what they are. They are what we would most dearly love to be like" (195-96). Although Nietzsche elsewhere offers other "images of existence" (including a "new good and bad") capable of "judging by natural, affirmative standards," they all can be connected to "the fundamental passion of attraction, the passion of love" (196). I find my thoughts turning to 'the vindication of God,' and I am not sure Lampert's claim about love can accommodate Nietzsche's occasional pitches for cruelty, exploitation, slavery, and war.

I do endorse Lampert's thesis that Nietzsche's "whole story ends in *ecology*, in knowledge of the interconnectedness of life on earth that generates the human imperative to be true to the earth." And it is reasonable to add that "the ecological movement, already strong in certain parts of the West, is bound to get stronger as the evidence becomes ever more undeniable that environmental disasters are caused by human-initiated climate change" (196). Lampert even hopes that we'll eventually come to worship "new gods true to the earth."

To conclude his lectures, Lampert returns to Strauss and Plato, again referencing Strauss's suggestion (in the 10/20/1938 letter) that 'the specifically Platonic philosophy' can be separated from the Plato 'nearest my heart' (197). As I discuss above, the latter Plato is "Socrates becoming Socrates, gaining his comprehensive understanding of being as becoming, as *eros*." Although Lampert clearly thinks Strauss was a supremely gifted reader, writer, thinker, and teacher, he doesn't regard him as the "philosopher and philosophic

poet" that Plato and Nietzsche were. Repeating some points from his first Strauss lecture, in any case, Lampert argues that Strauss expressed "cautious encouragement of reading Nietzsche as the platonic political philosopher of our time" (198). Lampert finally invokes the final sentence of Strauss's chapter on Nietzsche: *Die vornehme Natur ersetzt die göttliche Natur* (noble nature replaces divine nature). In thinking about why Strauss presented this sentence in German, Lampert references *The City and Man*. As Lampert's first lecture quoted (but I didn't discuss), that book ends with 'the all-important question which is coeval with philosophy although the philosophers do not frequently pronounce it—the question *quid sit deus*' ("what is a god?" or "what might a god be?"). By deploying untranslated Latin, Strauss doesn't himself "pronounce" the question.[34] In both texts, Lampert powerfully infers, Strauss ended with "something he did not want to *pronounce* directly but wanted you to *question* and *wonder about*." Regarding the German ending of his Nietzsche chapter, Lampert eventually reached this conclusion about what Strauss meant: "nature as Nietzsche teaches it replaces nature as Plato taught it." And that, he adds, explains the title of his Beijing Lectures: "Strauss, Plato, Nietzsche."

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS ON PHILANTHROPY AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

In interpreting Plato, Lampert is perhaps the most innovative. Unlike Plato, Nietzsche did not present a seductive surface that differs profoundly from what Lampert uncovers about him. Even regarding Nietzsche (and Strauss), however, Lampert provides abundant illumination regarding centers, sequencing, allusions, repetitions, untranslated quotations, and even punctuation. Lampert also works wonders regarding Zarathustra's disciples and *BGE*'s complex interactions with Nietzsche's "friends."

Following Nietzsche, Lampert worries intensely about the damage that "modern" compassion and egalitarianism are doing to both societies and souls. Fortunately, most people today appreciate the "genius" that continues to garner acclaim in science, engineering, music, dance, sports, and other realms. Although Lampert protests the contemporary world's commitment to "the equality of rights," he is more egalitarian than the trio he dissects because he lays things out so clearly. I assume that most readers will nonetheless join me in perceiving all four authors as having a higher "rank" than we do. Lampert, however, does not advance debates about equality by developing–in the *Lectures* or elsewhere–policy implications regarding abortion, taxation, unions, reparations, food stamps, the

34 As I did previously mention, Lampert says that the theological discussion between Socrates and Adeimantus in Book III reflects "the implicit premise that there are gods, or that there is a god and that they know what a god is" (24).

minimum wage, academic "tracking," standardized tests, or the voting age.[35] Nor does he address roiling disputes about suffering in connection with immigration, health care, homelessness, incarceration, police brutality, human trafficking, or famines. It is reasonable to infer, however, that he had reservations about fist-on-the-scale affirmative action and more recent academic policies such as "labor-based grading" and "citation justice." He would certainly oppose the war on Classics,[36] and he might even welcome the return of schoolyard dodgeball.

Among the four authors, Plato delves the most into institutional analysis, demonstrating a nuanced appreciation of regime structures, but Lampert and Strauss discourage us from concluding that either Socrates or the Athenian Stranger intended to push practical proposals. Correspondingly, Strauss identified Aristotle rather than Plato as the founder of "political science" (*CM*, 12, 21, 29). Strauss himself provided modest guidelines, or at least suggestions, regarding issues such as constitutionalism, the separation of powers, electoral terms, and executive prerogative. He also presented critiques of "behavioristic" political science and barbs about the Cold War. Lampert's work, meanwhile, can promote an array of Green agendas—attracting Straussians and Nietzscheans while deconstructing Greta Thunberg.[37]

Given where the lectures were delivered, we should think about how China might ally with the United States to express love of the earth. Educational discipline, aesthetic refinement, "rank order," and reverence for the past are not being widely denounced there by progressives;[38] in his foreword, Lampert reports that all of Strauss's writings have been translated into Chinese (viii-ix), along with most of Lampert's books (xi). China is already taking huge strides to promote solar power and electric vehicles. If serious study of Plato, Nietzsche, Strauss, and Lampert continues to advance there, perhaps China can be persuaded to stop expanding its nuclear arsenal, building aircraft carriers, bullying Taiwan, and creating artificial islands as military bases. I assume Lampert would share my worry that both countries, for the foreseeable future, will be facing titanic challenges regarding pollution, global warming, collapsing biodiversity, and other environmental problems. To address these challenges, consumption must decrease, despite the suffering that would follow, and international cooperation must increase.

Lampert's works excel in the philanthropy they channel to the minds,

35 A Cambridge political scientist, David Runciman, argues that six-year-olds should be casting ballots: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/dec/13/cambridge-academic-defends-idea-of-giving-children-the-vote. Lyman Stone, an American demographer, would extend the franchise to newborns: https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/01/opinion/politics/kids-right-to-vote.html.

36 For a recent salvo, see Dan-El Padilla Peralta, *Classicism & Other Phobias* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2025).

37 I have made brief forays along these lines in "From the Death of God to the Death of Man: What Nietzsche and Lampert Can Teach Catholics—and Straussians—about Environmentalism," in Dunn and Telli, eds., *A New Politics for Philosophy*, 251-273.

38 Such principles, of course, were widely assaulted during the Cultural Revolution.

hearts, and souls of their readers. In this respect, they provide a fitting tribute to his three favorite authors. Moreover, I hope that studying him seriously would help immunize readers against demonizing, scapegoating, *ressentiment*, consumerism, vulgarity, celebrity culture, and even the MAGA movement. And wouldn't worship of Dionysos and Ariadne be preferable to infatuation with the caliphate, militarism, intoxicants, slot machines, Mortal Kombat, Tik Tok, transhumanism, cryptocurrency, pornography, QAnon, and "the right side of history"?

Regarding politics, Lampert is less alarmist, contemptuous, or harsh than Strauss sometimes is. On the other hand, perhaps Strauss, by promoting escape from various "caves" (e.g., by reopening "the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns") rather than using poetry to conjure new ones, models humility better than Nietzsche or Lampert. Regarding politics, morals, and religion, furthermore, perhaps Lampert is too rapturous regarding Nietzsche. Neither Nietzsche's reasoning nor his "poetry" have succeeded in vanquishing biblical monotheism or widespread belief in an afterlife; Strauss differs from the two professed atheists by conveying regular tributes, or at least accommodations, to revelation and the Bible.[39] As Lampert elsewhere laments, moreover, some of Nietzsche's poetry proved catastrophic in the impetus it gave to the Nazis. But perhaps Lampert's kinder, gentler, and vastly subtler version can lure contemporary Nietzsche-lovers away from Nazism, fascism, and militarism, not to mention the Bronze Age Pervert.

Lampert loved the last sentence in Strauss's essay, "What Is Liberal Education?" And that sentence echoes both Plato and Nietzsche: "By becoming aware of the dignity of the mind, we realize the true ground of the dignity of man and therewith the goodness of the world, whether we understand it as created or as uncreated, which is the home of man because it is the home of the human mind."[40]

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39 To cite only texts discussed above, I would emphasize the "Jerusalem and Athens" chapter in *SPPP* and the second paragraph of *The City and Man*, which invokes "the Divine message," "the Faithful City," the Ten Commandments, and "the living God."

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Peter Minowitz is professor of political science at Santa Clara University, where he cofounded the environmental studies program. In addition to Profits, Priests, and Princes: Adam Smith's Emancipation of Economics from Politics and Religion *(Stanford University Press, 1993), Minowitz wrote S*traussophobia: Defending Leo Strauss and Straussians against Shadia Drury and Other Accusers *(Lexington Books, 2009). Along with his articles about Smith or Strauss, Minowitz has published chapters or articles about Plato's Apology, More's Utopia, Machiavelli, Locke, Marx, Nietzsche, Lampert, Harvey Mansfield, Frank Herbert's Dune series, Woody Allen's Crimes and Misdemeanors, diversity, campus protests, Laudato Si', and the Stop WOKE Act. He also edited the 2015* Perspectives on Political Science symposium on Arthur Melzer's Philosophy Between the Lines: The Lost History of Esoteric Writing.