The Straussian Moment

Peter Thiel
President, Clarium Capital Management

For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;
Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight dropping down with costly bales;
Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain'd a ghastly dew
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue;
Far along the world-wide whisper of the south-wind rushing warm,
With the standards of the peoples plunging thro' the thunder-storm;
Till the war-drum throbb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were furl'd
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.
There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in awe,
And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law.

—Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Locksley Hall"

The twenty-first century started with a bang on September 11, 2001. In those shocking hours, the entire political and military framework of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and indeed of the modern age, with its emphasis on deterrent armies, rational nation-states, public debates, and international diplomacy, was called into question. For how could mere talking or even great force deter a handful of crazy, determined, and suicidal persons who seemingly operated outside of all the norms of the liberal

West? And what needed now to be done, given that technology had advanced to a point where a tiny number of people could inflict unprecedented levels of damage and death?

The awareness of the West's vulnerability called for a new compromise, and this new compromise inexorably demanded more security at the expense of less freedom. On the narrow level of public policy, there needed to be more x-ray machines at airports; more security guards on airplanes; more identification cards and invasions of privacy; and fewer rights for some of the accused. Overnight, the fundamentalist civil rights mania of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which spoke in the language of inviolable individual rights, was rendered an unviable anachronism.

Even as the debate over freedom and security gathered strength, whatever military force could be mustered was used to track down those responsible for the violence of September 11. Despite rapid mobilization, those efforts met with limited success. America's antiquated military was not suited to fight such an enemy, for the enemy needed to be pursued not only in America, or in a handful of terrorist camps in Afghanistan, but to the very ends of the Earth. Even worse, like the Hydra, the enemy proliferated, so that for every slain jihadist, ten more arose to seek martyrdom in perverse emulation.

On the broader level of international cooperation and development, September 11 called for wholly different arrangements. The issue of unilateralism, and of the institutions designed to provide a cover for unilateralism, could be raised publicly by serious people for the first time since 1945. Much has been said elsewhere about the relative roles of the United States and the United Nations in the political sphere, but the underlying debates extend to even more fundamental issues.

For present purposes, it is worth drawing attention to one such fundamental issue, the twentieth-century policy debate about the containment of violence. Following World War II, the centrist consensus on international development called for enormous wealth transfers from the developed to the developing world. Under the aegis of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and an array of other organizations, hundreds of billions of dollars were funneled (in cheap loans or outright grants) to Third World governments, thereby, as the theory went, fostering economic growth and prosperity. But was this consensus right? Are economic incentives in fact powerful enough to contain violence?

Ex ante, wealth transfers made a certain amount of sense in the late 1940s. Those who had taken Marx seriously and were haunted by the specter of communist revolution hoped the wealth transfer apparatus would help win

the Cold War and bring about world peace. For the Rockefellers to keep their fortunes (and their heads), it was perhaps prudent for them to give some of what they had to the wretched of the Earth and make them a little bit less wretched.

But *ex post,* one wonders how policymakers could have been so naïve. Let us set aside the inconvenient fact that the wealth transfer apparatus never worked as advertised, so that the West's wealth was largely squandered on white elephant projects, no real economic development took place, and even in the best of cases the money simply circulated back to the West, ending up in Swiss bank accounts held by Third World dictators. As recent events have illustrated vividly, the real problem with the theory goes much deeper. For when the long-expected blow finally came, it did not come from the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, or from starving peasants in Burkina Faso, or from Tibetan yak herders earning less than a dollar a day. On the contrary, it came from a direction none of the modern theories had predicted: the perpetrators were upper-middle-class Saudi Arabians, often with college degrees and with great expectations. Their mastermind, Osama bin Laden, had inherited a fortune now worth an estimated $250 million, mostly made during the Saudi oil boom of the 1970s. Had he been born in America, bin Laden could have been a Rockefeller.

In this way, the singular example of bin Laden and his followers has rendered incomplete the economically motivated political thought that has dominated the modern West. From *The Wealth of Nations* on the right to *Das Kapital* on the left, and to Hegel and Kant and their many followers somewhere in between, the brute facts of September 11 demand a reexamination of the foundations of modern politics. The openly intellectual agenda of this essay is to suggest what that reexamination entails.

The Question of Human Nature

From the Enlightenment on, modern political philosophy has been characterized by the abandonment of a set of questions that an earlier age had deemed central: What is a well-lived life? What does it mean to be human? What is the nature of the city and humanity? How does culture and religion fit into all of this? For the modern world, the death of God was followed by the disappearance of the question of human nature.

This disappearance had many repercussions. If humans can be approximated as rational economic actors (and, ultimately, even Adam Smith and

Karl Marx agree on this point), then those who seek glory in the name of God or country appear odd; but if such odd people are commonplace and capable of asserting themselves with explosive force, then the account of politics that pretends they do not exist needs to be reexamined.

There is, of course, an older Western tradition, a tradition that offered a less dogmatically economic view of human nature. That older account realized that not all people are so modest and lacking in ambition that they will content themselves, like Voltaire's Candide, with cultivating their gardens. Instead, it recognized that humans are potentially evil or at least dangerous beings; and, while there are vast differences between the Christian virtues of Augustine and the pagan virtues of Machiavelli, neither thinker would have dared lose sight of the problematic nature of humanity.[1]

The most direct method for comprehending a world in which not all human beings are *homo economicus* would therefore appear to involve a return to some version of the older tradition. However, before we try to embark on that return, there is another mystery we must confront: Why did the older tradition fail in the first place? After all, it seemed to ask some obvious and important questions. How could these questions simply be abandoned and forgotten?

On a theoretical level, the older tradition consisted of two radically incompatible streams symbolized by Athens and Jerusalem. An enormous gulf separates Athens from Jerusalem. Pierre Manent summarizes this division in *The City of Man:*

> In the eyes of the citizen, what value is there to the mortification of the Christian, when what matters is not to fall on one's knees but to mount one's horse, and the sins one ought to expiate or rather correct are not the sins one commits against chastity and truth, but military and political errors? In the eyes of the Christian, what value is there to the political and military endeavors of the citizen, when he believes that, victory or defeat, whatever the regime, this world is a vale of tears ravaged by sin and that states are nothing more and better than vast bands of robbers? To each of the two protagonists, the sacrifices the other calls for are vain.[2]

For a long time, in the Middle Ages and thereafter, the West tried to gloss over these conflicts and instead to build on the many things these traditions had in common, but in the long term, like two giant millstones grinding against one another, "city and church . . . wore each other down as they went from conflicts to conciliations. Each one's efforts to return to its original truth had

strangely wrought its own defeat."[3] Neither side ever could win decisively, but in the long term, each side could decisively discredit the other, thus giving rise to the modern "individual" who defines him- or herself by rejecting all forms of sacrifice: "Since the city and the church reproach one another with the vanity of their sacrifice, the individual is the man who rejects each form of sacrifice and defines himself by this refusal."[4]

In practice, this dialectic was never simply or even primarily intellectual. For when one takes these questions seriously, they have serious repercussions, and the same holds for the modern and inverse movement that involved their abandonment.

The early modern era of the West—the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—was characterized by the disintegration of these two older traditions and by ever more desperate attempts to force everything back together into some functioning whole. Where agreement over questions of virtue, the good life, and the true religion was unraveling, the immediate attempt involved forging such an agreement through force. This force escalated in the periods of the Reformation and Counter Reformation, and culminated in the paroxysm of the Thirty Years' War, which remains perhaps the most deadly period in the history of Europe. By some estimates, in Germany, the locus of the conflict, well over half the population was eradicated.

However, at the end of this process, agreement had become more elusive than ever, the differences greater than ever. The violence had failed to create a new unity. This failure was formalized in the Peace of Westphalia, so that 1648 can be fixed as the single year that dates the birth of the modern era. Questions of virtue and the true religion henceforth would be decided by each sovereign. The sovereigns would agree to disagree. Inexorably, questions of virtue and religion became private questions; polite and respectable individuals learned not to talk about them too much, because they could lead to nothing but unproductive conflicts.

For the modern world, questions about the nature of humanity would be viewed on par with the struggle among the Lilliputians about the correct way to cut open an egg. Hobbes, the first truly modern philosopher, boasted of how he deserted and ran away from fighting in a religious war; a cowardly life had become preferable to a heroic but meaningless death.[5] *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* had been an important part of the old tradition; henceforth, it would be seen as nothing more than an old lie.

And so, the Enlightenment undertook a major strategic retreat. If the only way to stop people from killing one another about the right way to open an egg involved a world where nobody thought about it too much, then the

intellectual cost of ceasing such thought seemed a small price to pay. The question of human nature was abandoned because it is too perilous a question to debate.

John Locke: The American Compromise

The new science of economics and the practice of capitalism filled the vacuum created by the abandonment of the older tradition. That new science found its most important proponent in John Locke and its greatest practical success in the United States, a nation whose conception owed so much to Locke that one exaggerates only slightly to describe him as its definitive founder.

We must return to the eighteenth century to appreciate the tremendous change Locke wrought. Revolutionary America was haunted by the fear of religious war and the fanatical imposition of virtue on the entire state. The Declaration of Independence's evocation of "the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" had a counterpoint in the older tradition, in which the first two had not existed and the pursuit of happiness would have seemed inferior to (and certainly much more subjective than) the virtuous life. When one fast-forwards to the America of the 1990s, the larger context of the Founding had been forgotten: America had proved so successful in shaping the modern world that most Americans could no longer recognize the originality and strangeness of its founding conception.

Locke's personal example is instructive of the subtle path toward the liberalism of the American Revolution. Locke's argument proceeds in an understated manner; he does not wish to inflame passions by taking sides in the contentious debates of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But since it would be offensive to suggest that the things that matter most to people are silly or irrelevant, he also must avoid inflaming passions by openly denigrating all those who do take sides. In no place is there a greater need for sensitivity than on the question of religion. Religious passions had led to religious wars, but a passionate repudiation of religion (and of Christianity in particular) did not promise peace. Locke did not need the examples of the French or Russian Revolutions to know this.

And so the philosopher takes a seemingly moderate path. In *The Reasonableness of Christianity,* the philosopher sets out to denounce those "justly decried" atheists who have openly questioned the importance of the rules set for mortals by the deity.[6] But in the process of this denunciation, we learn many new things about those rules. Locke teaches us that the command

for children to honor their parents does not apply if the parents have been "unnaturally careless."[7] Marriage remains an important compact, but "the Wife has, in many cases, a Liberty to separate from [the husband],"[8] and "[t]he first and strongest desire God planted in men" is not love of God or others but a healthy concern with one's self-preservation.[9] Unfortunately, the state of nature is an "ill condition," so that those living in it are "needy and wretched"; the escape from nature, however, provides the path to self-preservation and happiness.[10] It follows from this that humans are not stewards of nature (for God has provided very little to start with), but are themselves the creators of wealth and property: "[L]abor makes the far greatest part of the value of things we enjoy in this world."[11] From there, the stretch to capitalist basics is modest. Avarice is no longer a mortal sin, and there is nothing wrong with the infinite accumulation of wealth;[12] it follows quite naturally that "the law of God and nature" says that government "must not raise taxes on the property of the people without the consent of the people, given by themselves, or their deputies."[13]

As for the person of Christ, Locke informs us that Jesus's words were not to be taken plainly. If Jesus had told people exactly what he was up to, the Jewish and Roman authorities "would have taken away his life; at least they would have . . . hindered the work he was about," for his teachings would have threatened the civic order and functioning of government. And so Christ concealed his meaning so that he might live and teach.[14] Locke's conception of Christ is a world removed from that of the medieval passion plays or *The Passion* of Mel Gibson; still, the character Locke attributes to Christ comports rather well with the character that one reasonably might attribute to Locke himself and the passionless world he set out to create.

Over time, the country founded by Locke would do away with Christian religiosity even as it maintained many outward appearances of it. The United States eventually would become more secular and materialist, though most of its citizens would continue to call themselves "Christians."[15] There would be no catastrophic war against religion of the sort one had in France or Russia, but there would be no counterrevolution either. Only occasionally would conservative moralists express their perplexity at how a nation ostensibly founded on Christian principles ever could have drifted so far from its original conception; never would it cross their minds to think that this process of gradual drift had been a part of that original conception.

* * *

In a capitalist world, violent debates about truth—whether they concern questions of religion and virtue or questions about the nature of humanity—interfere with the productive conduct of commerce. It is therefore best for such questions to be eliminated or obscured. Thus, in Hobbes, all human complexity is reduced to the desire for power:

> The passions that most of all cause the difference of wit, are principally, the more or less desire of power, of riches, of knowledge, and of honour. All which may be reduced to the first, that is, desire of power. For riches, knowledge, and honour, are but several sorts of power.[16]

In Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* the author elaborates the conception of power, while stripping it even further of anything that is specifically human: the will is the power to prefer one action over another; liberty is the power to act on this preference; the understanding is a power; a substance is merely the power to produce certain empirical effects, but these effects tell us nothing of the nature of the underlying substance.[17]

Once again, Locke proceeds cautiously. He does not directly tell us that human nature does not exist or that the older tradition of Aristotle or Aquinas is definitively wrong; he does not seek that clear a break with the past,[18] but he undermines the older tradition relentlessly, for when we observe things (and these things include other people), we can see only their secondary effects as manifested by their various powers.[19] We cannot know anything about their true natures or substances; it is an irreducible part of the human condition for humans to be limited, so that they can never know anything about the nature of humanity.[20] To ask a question about human substance, or the teleology of humanity's power, leads to debates as meaningless as "whether the best Relish were to be found in Apples, Plumbs, or Nuts."[21]

In the place of human nature, Locke leaves us with an unknowable "X."[22] This awareness of ignorance provides the low but solid ground on which the American Founding takes place. The human "X" may have certain wants and preferences, but nobody is in an authoritative position from which to challenge those desires.[23] And so, in a somewhat paradoxical manner, the unknowability of "X" leads to classic liberalism and the very strong assertion of the different rights that belong to that unknowable "X": the freedom of religion, for we cannot ever know what people are truly thinking in the temple of their minds; the freedom of speech, for we cannot irrefutably criticize the way people express themselves; the right to property and commerce, for we cannot second-guess what people will do with the things

they possess.[24] "Capitalism," concludes Nobel laureate Milton Friedman, "is simply what humans do when they are left alone."

Of course, there are all sorts of hard boundary cases. One might wonder about what a libertarian framework has to say about the rights of children or criminals or insane people, or the limits of commodification (extortionate interest rates, indentured servitude, prostitution, sale of body parts, and so forth). But for Locke and the other American founders, these exceptional cases could be deferred for later consideration; in any event, the general principle of the unknowability of the human "X" would encourage a gradual expansion, over time, of the field of human freedom.[25]

There is one especially important category of boundary cases, and that concerns the question of origins. We shall return to that broader question later, but here it is worth noting one specific variant: even though we should not interfere with people disposing of their property as they see fit, how do we know that the property was acquired justly in the first place? The great importance of strong property rights would seem to force us to ask some hard questions about the origins of the property itself.

Once again, however, Locke urges us not to worry too much: there is very little value in the state of nature, and most value has been added by human work or intellect.[26] As a result, we need not reflect on the past and can focus on the future: Most new wealth will be created by the strong enforcement of property rights going forward and will be enjoyed by those who play by the capitalist rules.[27] Those who acquired their property through violence will not be capable of growing their fortunes, and in time will possess only a small and uninfluential fraction of the world's wealth. Locke would dismiss out of hand Balzac's sweeping and subversive notion that "behind every great fortune there lies a crime." We need not heed Brecht's call for more inspectors and inquisitors. Nothing should stop us from enjoying the prosperous tranquility of the capitalist paradise we have built for ourselves.

* * *

Since September 11, our peace has been broken. For there remains another very important boundary whose existence the American people had forgotten. They had forgotten about the rest of the world and its deep division from the West. The non-Western world had not yet seen the Peace of Westphalia. The progress of the Enlightenment has occurred at different rates in different parts of the world. And in that world outside the West, questions of religion and the purpose of humanity remained central; even in 2001 the greatest fear

was not the fear of a painful death but the fear of what would happen to one in the life after that death.

And so, a religious war has been brought to a land that no longer cares for religious wars. Even President Bush, who styles himself a religious conservative, cannot bring himself to believe that it is religion that really matters: "[T]his great nation of many religions understands our war is not against Islam or against the faith practiced by the Muslim people."[28]

Where Bush downplays the differences, bin Laden emphasizes them, contrasting the world of pure Islam and the world of the decadent West in the most extreme way imaginable: "[T]he love of this world is wrong. You should love the other world . . . die in the right cause and go to the other world."[29]

Unfortunately, bin Laden is not simply an irrelevant crackpot of the sort that one might find screaming at the bemused spectators in Hyde Park. For bin Laden, unlike Locke, hard questions of morality and conduct need no postponement; their answers are clear and resolution cannot be delayed. Bin Laden is a passionate man of wealth and power, so that his personal example reminds us of the boundary cases Locke so readily dismissed.

Indeed, the oil industry, the source of bin Laden's wealth, presents one of the most glaring examples that run counter to Locke's felicitous generalizations. For most of the value of oil exists simply in nature, so that the "labor" that humans add by extracting and refining this oil is proportionately quite small. At the same time, however, economies rise and fall on the price of crude oil, so that it represents a significant share of the world's wealth. Indeed, the original expropriation of that oil built as many as half of the greatest fortunes of the twentieth century. And so the development of the oil industry, presided over by autocrats and despots from Asia to the Middle East and Africa, is the not-so-hidden story of crime on a scale so grand that the proceeds of that crime sufficed to purchase respectability and almost everything else. In helping to craft the post–World War II centrist economic policy consensus, the Rockefellers had forgotten their own family history.

Of course, in the long run, it may well be that power and prosperity go to those who follow Locke's capitalist rules, so that in the long run, the religious fanatics who have so violently and suddenly interposed themselves will eventually lack the wealth and the technology needed to threaten the nonreligious world the Enlightenment has built in the West; but none of this will matter if we are all dead in the short run.

Today, mere self-preservation forces all of us to look at the world anew, to think strange new thoughts, and thereby to awaken from that very long and profitable period of intellectual slumber and amnesia that is so misleadingly called the Enlightenment.

Carl Schmitt: The Persistence of the Political

But why should one return to the older tradition, when the newer world of commerce and capitalism at every point seems so much simpler and happier and more pragmatic? The German legal scholar Carl Schmitt offers an extreme alternative to Locke and all the thinkers of the Enlightenment. He concedes with the signatories of Westphalia that there never will be any agreement on the most important things, on questions of religion and virtue and the nature of humanity.[30] But where Locke says that it is in humanity's nature to know nothing about the nature of humanity, Schmitt responds that it is equally a part of the human condition to be divided by such questions and to be forced to take sides.[31]

Politics is the field of battle in which that division takes place, in which humans are forced to choose between friends and enemies. "The high points of politics," declares Schmitt, "are the moments in which the enemy is, in concrete clarity, recognized as the enemy."[32] The enemy is the one whose very presence forces us to confront the foundational questions about human nature anew; "the enemy is our own question as a figure."[33] Because of the permanence of these always contentious questions, one cannot unilaterally escape from all politics; those who attempt to do so are suffering from moments of supreme self-delusion; these include the signatories of the Kellogg Pact of 1928, which outlawed all war.[34]

Indeed, it is even worse: "[I]f a part of the population declares that it no longer recognizes enemies, then, depending on the circumstance, it joins their side and aids them."[35] There is no safety in unilateral disarmament. When one chooses not to decide, one still has a made a choice—invariably a mistaken choice, which implicitly assumes that humankind is fundamentally good or unproblematic.[36] For Schmitt, "it is a symptom of the political end":

> In Russia, before the Revolution, the doomed classes romanticized the Russian peasant as a good, brave, and Christian muzhik. . . . The aristocratic society of France before the Revolution of 1789 sentimentalized "man who is by nature good" and the virtue of the masses. . . . Nobody scented the revolution; it is incredible to see the security and unsuspiciousness with which these privileged spoke of the goodness, mildness, and innocence of the people when 1793 was already upon them—*spectacle ridicule et terrible*.[37]

Absent an invasion by aliens from outer space, there never can be a world state that politically unites all of humanity. It is a logical impossibility:

> The political entity cannot by its very nature be universal in the sense of embracing all of humanity and the entire world. If the different states, religions, classes, and other human groupings on earth should be so unified that a conflict among them is impossible and even inconceivable and if civil war should forever be foreclosed in a realm that embraces the globe, then the distinction of friend and enemy would also cease.[38]

In the medieval Catholic tradition, Schmitt sees the permanent political division of humanity as a pale reflection of an "eschatologically conceived state of historicity," which ultimately forces people to follow or reject Christ.[39] He connects the political and the religious by declaring himself against the "neutralizers, aesthetic inhabitants of Cockaigne, abortionists, cremationists and pacifists."[40] Just as pacifists believe that the political decision can be avoided in this world, so cremators reject the physical resurrection and the religious decision that needs to be made for the next world.

In this way, politics serves as a constant reminder to a fallen humanity that life is serious and that there are things that truly matter, and so Schmitt cites with great approval the Puritan Oliver Cromwell's speech denouncing Spain:

> Why, truly, your great Enemy is the Spaniard. He is the natural enemy. He is naturally so; he is naturally so throughout, by reason of that enmity that is in him against whatsoever is of God. "Whatsoever is of God" which is in you, or which may be in you.[41]

When bin Laden declares war on "the infidels, the Zionists, and the crusaders," Schmitt would not counsel reasoned half-measures. He would urge a new crusade as a way to rediscover the meaning and purpose of our lives, perhaps borrowing the exhortation from Pope Urban II at the Council of Clermont, who urged his eager listeners on to the First Crusade back in 1096: "Let the army of the Lord, when it rushes upon his enemies, shout but that one cry, '*Dieu le veult! Dieu le veult!*'"

* * *

Whatever its shortcomings, Schmitt's account of politics captures the essential strangeness of the unfolding confrontation between the West and Islam. This strangeness consists of the radical difference between the way the confrontation itself is viewed by the two sides. Perhaps never before in history

has there been such a radical difference. The Islamic side retains a strong religious and political conception of reality; it views its struggle with the West as a matter more important than life and death, because Allah will judge his followers in the afterlife by how they performed in that struggle. Bin Laden would quote with approval the speeches of Cromwell and Urban II, requiring almost no changes at all. The language still resonates and motivates heroic self-sacrifice.

By contrast, on the Western side (if it can even be called a side), there is great confusion over what the fighting is for, and why there should be a civilizational war at all. An outright declaration of war against Islam would be unthinkable; we much prefer to think of these measures as police actions against a few unusual criminal sociopaths who happen to blow up buildings. We are nervous about considering a larger meaning to the struggle, and even the staunchest Western partisans of war know that we no longer believe in the existence of a *Gott mit uns* in heaven.

And then one encounters Schmitt's troubling challenge. A side in which everyone, like Hobbes, values this earthly life more than death is a side where everyone will run away from fighting and confrontation; but when one runs away from an enemy that continues to fight, one is ultimately going to lose—no matter how great the numerical or technological superiority may appear at the outset. Schmitt's solution to this impending defeat demands an affirmation of the political in the West. Here, however, one must confront an alternative and perhaps even more troubling conclusion. For let us assume that it is possible, somehow, to turn back the clock and set aside our uncertainties; that we can return to the faith of Cromwell and Urban II; that we understand Islam as the providential enemy of the West; and that we can then respond to Islam with the same ferocity with which it is now attacking the West. This would be a Pyrrhic victory, for it would come at the price of doing away with everything that fundamentally distinguishes the modern West from Islam.

A dangerous dynamic lurks in Schmitt's division of the world into friends and enemies. It is a dynamic that destroys the distinction and that altogether escapes Schmitt's clever calculations: one must choose one's enemies well, for one will soon be just like them.

* * *

If one agrees with Schmitt's starting assumptions, then the West must lose the war or lose its identity. One way or the other, the persistence of the political spells the doom of the modern West; but for the sake of completeness, we

must consider also the inverse possibility, indirectly hinted at in the margins of Schmitt's own writings. For while it may well be that the political guarantees the seriousness of life and that, so long as the political exists, the world will remain divided, there is no guarantee that the political itself will survive.[42]

Let us grant that unilateral disarmament is impossible, at least for those who value survival, but is it not perhaps possible for everyone to disarm at once, and for everyone to reject politics at the same time? There can be no worldwide political entity, but there is a possibility of a worldwide abandonment of politics.

The Hegelian Alexandre Kojève believed that the end of history would be marked by the definitive abandonment of all the hard questions. Humanity itself would disappear, but there would no longer be any conflict:

> If Man becomes an animal again, his acts, his loves, and his play must also become purely "natural" again. Hence it would have to be admitted that after the end of History, men would construct their edifices and works of art as birds build their nests and spiders spin their webs. . . . "The *definitive annihilation* of Man *properly so-called*" also means the definitive disappearance of human Discourse (*Logos*) in the strict sense. Animals of the species *Homo sapiens* would react by conditioned reflexes to vocal signals or sign "language," and thus their so-called "discourses" would be like what is supposed to be the "language" of bees. What would disappear, then, is not only Philosophy or the search for discursive Wisdom, but also that Wisdom itself.[43]

Schmitt echoes these sentiments, albeit with rather different conclusions. In such a unified world, "what remains is neither politics nor state, but culture, civilization, economics, morality, law, art, entertainment, etc."[44] The world of "entertainment" represents the culmination of the shift away from politics. A representation of reality might appear to replace reality: instead of violent wars, there could be violent video games; instead of heroic feats, there could be thrilling amusement park rides; instead of serious thought, there could be "intrigues of all sorts," as in a soap opera. It is a world where people spend their lives amusing themselves to death.

Schmitt does not reject the possibility of such a world out of hand, but believes that it will not happen in an entirely autochthonous manner:

> The acute question to pose is upon whom will fall the frightening power implied in a world-embracing economic and technical organization. This question can by no means be dismissed in the belief that everything would

> then function automatically, that things would administer themselves, and that a government by people over people would be superfluous because human beings would then be absolutely free. For what would they be free? This can be answered by optimistic or pessimistic conjectures, all of which finally lead to an anthropological profession of faith.[45]

Such an artificial world requires a "religion of technicity" that has faith in the "unlimited power and dominion over nature . . . [and] in the unlimited potential for change and for happiness in the natural this-worldly existence of man."[46] For Schmitt the political theologian, this "Babylonian unity" represents a brief harmony that prefigures the final catastrophe of the Apocalypse.[47] Following the medieval tradition, Schmitt knows and fears that this artificial unity can be brought about only by the shadowy figure of the Antichrist.[48] He will surreptitiously take over the entire world at the end of human history by seducing people with the promise of "peace and security":

> God created the world; the Antichrist counterfeits it. . . . The sinister magician recreates the world, changes the face of the earth, and subdues nature. Nature serves him; for what purpose is a matter of indifference—for any satisfaction of artificial needs, for ease and comfort. Men who allow themselves to be deceived by him see only the fabulous effect; nature seems to be overcome, the age of security dawns; everything has been taken care of, a clever foresight and planning replace Providence.[49]

The world where everything seems to administer itself is the world of science fiction, of Stephenson's *Snow Crash,* or of *The Matrix* for those who choose not to take their red pills. But no representation of reality ever is the same as reality, and one must never lose sight of the larger framework within which the representation exists. The price of abandoning oneself to such an artificial representation is always too high, because the decisions that are avoided are always too important.[50] By making people forget that they have souls, the Antichrist will succeed in swindling people out of them.[51]

Leo Strauss: Proceed with Caution

We are at an impasse.

On the one hand, we have the newer project of the Enlightenment, which never became comprehensive on a global scale, and perhaps always came at

too high a price of self-stultification. On the other hand, we have a return to the older tradition, but that return is fraught with far too much violence. The incredibly drastic solutions favored by Schmitt in his dark musings have become impossible after 1945, in a world of nuclear weapons and limitless destruction through technology.

What sort of coherent intellectual or practical synthesis is then possible at all? The political philosopher Leo Strauss attempted to solve this central paradox of the postmodern world. The challenge of that task is reflected in the difficulty of Strauss's own writings, which are prohibitively obscurantist to the uninitiated. A representative and not entirely random passage can serve as an illustration: "The unity of knowledge and communication of knowledge can also be compared to the combination of man and horse, although not to a centaur."[52]

Indeed, there is little in Strauss that is more clear than the need for less transparency. Unchecked philosophizing poses great risks to philosophers (as well as the cities they inhabit), as in even the most liberal or open-minded regimes there exist certain deeply problematic truths.[53] Strauss is convinced that he is not the first to have discovered or rediscovered these truths. The great writers and philosophers of the past also had known of these matters but, in order to protect themselves from persecution, these thinkers used an "esoteric" mode of writing in which their "literature is addressed, not to all readers, but to trustworthy and intelligent readers only."[54]

As a thought experiment, Strauss invites us to consider the position of a "historian living in a totalitarian country, a generally respected and unsuspected member of the only party in existence."[55] As a result of his studies, this historian comes "to doubt the soundness of the government-sponsored interpretation of the history of religion."[56] On an exoteric level, this historian will make a passionate defense of the state-sponsored view,[57] but esoterically, between the lines, "he would write three or four sentences in that terse and lively style which is apt to arrest the attention of young men who love to think."[58] It would be enough for the attentive reader, but not enough for the invariably less intelligent government censors.[59] Alternately, our writer might even state "certain truths quite openly by using as mouthpiece some disreputable character. . . . There would then be good reason for our finding in the greatest literature of the past so many interesting devils, madmen, beggars, sophists, drunkards, epicureans, and buffoons."[60]

Strauss summarizes the benefits of such a strange mode of discourse:

> It has all the advantages of private communication without having its greatest disadvantage—that it reaches only the writer's acquaintances. It has all

> the advantages of public communication without having its greatest disadvantage—capital punishment for the author.[61]

Because there are books (and perhaps other writings) that "do not reveal their full meaning as intended by the author unless one ponders over them 'day and night' for a long time," cultural relativism and intellectual nihilism are not the final word.[62] Strauss believes that there exists a truth about human nature, and that this truth can in principle be known to humanity. Indeed, the great writers of the past are in far more agreement about this truth than their exoteric disagreements would lead the superficial reader to believe, "for there were more great men who were stepsons of their time or out of step with the future than one would easily believe."[63] These writers only *appeared* to conform to the diverse cities they inhabited. Strauss alludes to the dangers they faced, by reminding us of the warning Goethe had Faust deliver to his assistant: "The few who understood something of men's heart and mind, who were foolish enough not to restrain their full heart but to reveal their feeling and their vision to the vulgar, have ever been crucified and burned."[64]

* * *

There are no short cuts in Strauss. The philosopher practices what he preaches, and so one will search in vain in Strauss's writings for a systematic statement of the hidden truth. Perhaps Strauss's only incremental concession to the would-be philosopher lies in the fact that his writings are transparently esoteric and hard to understand, in contradistinction to the past writers who wrote seemingly straightforward books whose truly esoteric nature was therefore even more obscured. "The open agenda of the Straussians," declares Harvard government professor Harvey Mansfield (and himself a Straussian), is limited to "reading the Great Books for their own sake," and does not include offering dumbed-down summaries.[65]

Nevertheless, certain themes emerge and recur—the question of the city and humanity, the issues of founding and origins, and the relation between religion and the best regime. To generalize a bit more, even if one does not take one's bearings entirely from the exceptional case (as do Machiavelli and Schmitt), it is a case that must not be forgotten. An account of politics that speaks only of the smooth functioning of the machinery of government is incomplete, and one also must consider the circumstances in which this machinery is built or created in the first place—and, by extension, where it might be threatened or modified and reconstructed.[66]

When one widens the aperture of one's investigations, one will find that there are more things in heaven and Earth than dreamt of in the modern world of Locke or Montaigne. The fact that these things are hidden does not mean that they do not exist or that they are unknowable. On the problematic question of origins, for instance, Strauss notes the surprising convergence, at least on the level of factual detail, in the Roman myth of the founding of the greatest city of the ancient world and in what the book of Genesis says about the founding of the first city in the history of the world.[67]

Does Strauss then believe that "there cannot be a great and glorious society without the equivalent of the murder of Remus by his brother Romulus?"[68] At first, he seems to suggest that America is the one exception in all of history to this rule, quoting with approval the patriotic Thomas Paine: "[T]he Independence of America [was] accompanied by a Revolution in the principles and practice of Governments. . . . Government founded on a moral theory, on a system of universal peace, on the indefeasible hereditary Rights of Man, is now revolving from west to east by a stronger impulse than the Government of the sword revolved from east to west."[69] But within a few pages, we find that even in the case of the American Founding, this patriotic account is not necessarily the whole truth, and the reader is informed that perhaps "America owes her greatness not only to her habitual adherence to the principles of freedom and justice, but also to her occasional deviation from them."[70] Moreover, we are told that there exists a "mischievous interpretation of the Louisiana Purchase and of the fate of the Red Indians."[71] Indeed, the philosopher's decision to write esoterically reminds us that even in America, the most liberal regime in history, there remain politically incorrect taboos.[72]

In reminding us of the permanent problems, the political philosopher agrees with the political theologian's exhortation to seriousness and also joins the latter in rejecting as illusory the notion that "everything has been taken care of." But because the philosopher does not share all the theologian's hopes and fears, there is more freedom in steering a middle course between "the Scylla of 'absolutism' and the Charybdis of 'relativism.'"[73] As Strauss puts it, "[t]here is a universally valid hierarchy of ends, but there are no universally valid rules of action."[74]

Strauss illustrates this claim by reminding us of "an extreme situation in which the very existence or independence of a society is at stake."[75] Such an extreme situation is represented by war. What a decent society will do during war "will depend to a certain extent on what the enemy—possibly an absolutely unscrupulous and savage enemy—forces it to do."[76] As a result, "[t]here are no limits which can be defined in advance, there are no assignable

limits to what might become just reprisals."[77] And moreover: "Considerations which apply to foreign enemies may well apply to subversive elements within society."[78] The philosopher ends with a plea to "leave these sad exigencies covered with the veil with which they are justly covered."[79]

* * *

Let us recapitulate. The modern West has lost faith in itself. In the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment period, this loss of faith liberated enormous commercial and creative forces. At the same time, this loss has rendered the West vulnerable. Is there a way to fortify the modern West without destroying it altogether, a way of not throwing the baby out with the bathwater?

At first sight, Strauss seems to offer such a moderate middle course, but his path too is fraught with peril. For as soon as the theoretical esotericism of the philosopher is combined with some sort of practical implementation, self-referential problems abound: the awareness of the problematic nature of the city makes the unreflective defense of the city impossible. In this way, Strauss's recovery of the permanent problems paradoxically might make their resolution all the more difficult. Or, to frame the matter in terms of Schmitt's eschatology, the Straussian project sets out to preserve the *katechon*, but instead becomes a "hastener against its will."[80] No new Alexander is in sight to cut the Gordian knot of our age.

Moreover, a direct path forward is prevented by America's constitutional machinery. By "setting ambition against ambition" with an elaborate system of checks and balances, it prevents any single ambitious person from reconstructing the old Republic. America's founders enjoyed a freedom of action far surpassing that of America's subsequent politicians. Eventually, ambitious people would come to learn that there is little one can do in politics and that all merely political careers end in failure. The intellectual paralysis of self-knowledge has its counterpoint in the political paralysis embedded in our open system of government.

Still, there are more possibilities for action than first appear, precisely because there are more domains than those enumerated by the conventional legal or juridical system. Roberto Calasso reminds us of the alternative thread in *The Ruin of Kasch:*

> The period between 1945 and the present could conceivably be rendered in two parallel histories: that of the historians, with its elaborate apparatus of parameters, discussing figures, masses, parties, movements, negotiations,

> productions; and that of the secret services, telling of murders, traps, betrayals, assassinations, cover-ups, and weapons shipments. We know that both accounts are insufficient, that both claim to be self-sufficient, that one could never be translated into the other, and that they will continue their parallel lives. But hasn't this perhaps always been the case . . . ?[81]

Strauss also reminds us of the exceptional framework needed to supplement the American regime: "The most just society cannot survive without 'intelligence,' i.e., espionage," even though "[e]spionage is impossible without a suspension of certain rules of natural right."[82] Again, there is no disagreement with Tennyson on ends, but only on means. Instead of the United Nations, filled with interminable and inconclusive parliamentary debates that resemble Shakespearean tales told by idiots, we should consider Echelon, the secret coordination of the world's intelligence services, as the decisive path to a truly global *pax Americana*.

Liberal critics who disagree with the philosopher also tend to dislike the philosopher's politics. Just as there appears to be something shaky and problematic about a theoretical framework that is not subject to the give and take of open debate, so there appears to be something subversive and immoral about a political framework that operates outside the checks and balances of representative democracy as described in high school textbooks; but if American liberalism is decisively incomplete, then its critique is no longer quite so decisive. For the Straussian, there can be no fundamental disagreement with Oswald Spengler's call for action at the dramatic finale of *Der Untergang des Abendlandes:*

> Für uns aber, die ein Schicksal in diese Kultur und diesen Augenblick ihres Werdens gestellt hat, in welchem das Geld seine letzten Siege feiert und sein Erbe, der Cäsarismus, leise und unaufhaltsam naht, ist damit in einem eng unschriebenen Kreise die Richtung des Wollens und Müssens gegeben, ohne das es sich nicht zu leben lohnt. Wir haben nicht die Freiheit, dies oder jenes zu erreichen, aber die, das Notwendige zu tun oder nichts. Und eine Aufgabe, welche die Notwendigkeit der Geschichte gestellt hat, *wird* gelöst, mit dem einzelnen oder gegen ihn.
>
> *Ducunt fata volentem, nolentem trahunt.*[83]

René Girard: The End of the City of Man

In spite of the inspiring sweep of the Straussian project, there remains a nagging suspicion that perhaps it is missing something fundamental altogether. And if the French literary theorist René Girard is even partially correct in his extraordinary account of the history of the world, then the Straussian moment of triumph may prove to be brief indeed.

In important ways, the Girardian analysis of the modern West echoes some of the themes already discussed. As with Schmitt and Strauss, Girard also believes that there exists a disturbing truth about the city and humanity, and that the whole issue of human violence has been whitewashed away by the Enlightenment. Moreover, there will come an hour when this truth is completely known: "No single question has more of a future today than the question of man."[84] The possibility of moving beyond the unknowable human "X" of John Locke and the eighteenth-century rationalists had already been implicit in the entire project of evolutionary science during the nineteenth century.[85] Just as Darwin's *The Origin of Species* transformed the natural sciences, some other writer's *The Origin of Religions* will provide the logical and chronological sequel and one day transform the sciences of humanity.[86]

For Girard, this post-Darwinian account must somehow combine the gradualism of Darwinian evolution with the essentialism of the pre-Darwinians, stressing both the continuity and discontinuity of humanity with the rest of the natural order. This more comprehensive account of human nature will be centered on an insight already contained in Aristotelian biology: "Man differs from the other animals in his greater aptitude for imitation."[87] Here one has both a difference of kind and one of degree, which can provide the basis for a synthesis between Aristotle and Darwin. Such a synthesis and relationship was already hinted at in the time of Shakespeare, when the word "ape" already meant both "primate" and "to imitate."

However, the new science of humanity must drive the idea of imitation, mimesis, much further than it has in the past. According to Girard, all cultural institutions, beginning with the acquisition of language by children from their parents, require this sort of mimetic activity, and so it is not overly reductionist to describe human brains as gigantic imitation machines. Because humanity would not exist without imitation, one cannot say that there is anything wrong with imitation per se or that those humans who imitate others are somehow inferior to those humans who do not. The latter group, according to Girard, simply does not exist—even though it remains the most

cherished myth of a diverse array of modern ideologies to celebrate an utterly fictional human self that exists independent of everyone else.

Nevertheless, the necessity of mimesis does not render it unproblematic. Conventionally, one tends to think of imitation as primarily representational, as in the learning of language and the transmission of various cultural institutions, but nothing prevents mimesis from extending into the acquisitive realm, or stops people from emulating the desires of others. In the process of "keeping up with the Joneses," mimesis pushes people into escalating rivalry. This disturbing truth of mimesis may explain why the knowledge about mimesis remains rather suppressed, in an almost unconscious way. Of all the mortal sins of medieval Catholicism, envy is the one closest to mimetic rivalry, and it is the one mortal sin that still remains a cultural taboo even in the most *avant garde* postmodern circles.

And finally: because the mimetic ability is more advanced in humans than in other animals, there exist in us no instinctual brakes that are strong enough to limit the scope of such rivalry. Thus, at the core of the mimetic account, there exists a mystery: What exactly happened in the distant past, when all the apes were reaching for the same object, when the rivalry between mimetic doubles threatened to escalate into unlimited violence?

* * *

For the philosophers of the Enlightenment, the war of all against all would culminate in a recognition by the warring parties of the irrationality of such a war. In the midst of the crisis, the warring parties would sit down, have a sober conversation, and draw up a social contract that would provide the basis for a peaceful society. Because Girard rightly views this account as preposterous, he considers the social contract to be the fundamental lie of the Enlightenment—a lie so brazen that none of the advocates of the social contract theory, from Hobbes to Rousseau, themselves believed it to be the case that an actual contract had ever been signed.

In Girard's alternative account of these matters, the war of all against all culminates not in a social contract but in a war of all against one, as the same mimetic forces gradually drive the combatants to gang up on one particular person. The war continues to escalate and there is no rational stopping point, at least not until this person becomes the scapegoat whose death helps to unite the community and bring about a limited peace for the survivors.[88]

That murder is the secret origin of all religious and political institutions, and is remembered and transfigured in the form of myth.[89] The scapegoat,

perceived as the primal source of conflict and disorder, had to die for there to be peace. By violence, violence was brought to an end and society was born. But because society rests on the belief in its own order and justice, the founding act of violence must be concealed—by the myth that the slain victim was really guilty. Thus, violence is lodged at the heart of society; myth is merely discourse ephemeral to violence. Myth sacralizes the violence of the founding murder: myth tells us that the violence was justified because the victim really was guilty and, at least in the context of archaic cultures, truly was powerful.[90] Myth transfigures the murdered scapegoats into gods, and religious rituals reenact the founding murder through the sacrifice of human or animal substitutes, thereby creating a kind of peace that is always mixed with a certain amount of violence.[91] The centrality of sacrifice was so great that those who managed to defer or avoid execution became the objects of veneration. Every king is a sort of living god, and therein lies the true origin of monarchy:

> There is no culture without a tomb and no tomb without a culture; in the end the tomb is the first and only cultural symbol. The above-ground tomb does not have to be invented. It is the pile of stones in which the victim of unanimous stoning is buried. It is the first pyramid.[92]

That is how things used to work. But we now live in a world where the cat is out of the bag, at least to the extent that we know that the scapegoat really is not as guilty as the persecuting community claims. Because the smooth functioning of human culture depended on a lack of understanding of this truth of human culture, the archaic rituals will no longer work for the modern world.

As in Hegel, the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only at dusk. The unveiling of the mythical past opens toward a future in which we no longer believe in any of the myths; in a dramatic rupture with the past, they will have been deconstructed and thereby discredited.[93] But unlike Hegel, our knowledge of our hidden history—of the "things hidden since the foundation of the world"—does not automatically bring about a glorious final synthesis.[94] Because these founding myths also served the critical role of distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate violence, their unraveling may deprive humanity of the efficacious functioning of the limited and sacred violence it needed to protect itself from unlimited and desacralized violence.

For Girard, this combination of mimesis and the unraveling of archaic culture implies that the modern world contains a powerfully apocalyptic

dimension. From a Girardian perspective, the current political debates remain inadequate for the contemporary world situation to the extent that, across the spectrum, there remains a denial of the founding role of the violence caused by human mimesis and, therefore, a systematic underestimation of the scope of apocalyptic violence. Nuclear weapons pose a horrific dilemma, but one could (just barely) imagine a nuclear standoff in which a handful of states remain locked in a cold war. But what if mimesis drives others to try and acquire these same weapons for the mimetic prestige they confer, so that the technological situation is never static, but instead contains a powerful escalatory dynamic?

One may define a "liberal" as someone who knows nothing of the past and of this history of violence, and still holds to the Enlightenment view of the natural goodness of humanity. And one may define a "conservative" as someone who knows nothing of the future and of the global world that is destined to be, and therefore still believes that the nation-state or other institutions rooted in sacred violence can contain unlimited human violence. The present risks a terrible synthesis of the blind spots in that doctrinaire thinking, a synthesis of violence and globalization in which all boundaries on violence are abolished, be they geographic, professional (for example, civilian noncombatants), or demographic (for example, children). At the extremes, even the distinction between violence inflicted on oneself and violence inflicted on other people is in the process of evaporating, in the disturbing new phenomenon of suicide-murderers. The word that best describes this unbounded, apocalyptic violence is "terrorism."

Indeed, one may wonder whether any sort of politics will remain possible for the exceptional generation that has learned the truth of human history for the first time. It is in this context that one must remember that the word apocalypse originally meant unveiling. For Girard, the unveiling of this terrible knowledge opens a catastrophic fault line below the city of man: "[I]t is truly the end of the world, the Christian apocalypse, the bottomless abyss of the unforgettable victim."[95]

History and Knowledge

In the debate between Strauss and Girard, perhaps the key issue of contention can be reduced to a question of *time*. When will this highly disturbing knowledge burst upon general awareness, render all politics impossible, and finally bring the city of man to an end?

If there is something prophetic about Girard's announcement of the founding murder, then Strauss might note that his situation also resembles the plight faced by Nietzsche's madman announcing the death of God to an unbelieving world:

> I come too early . . . my time has not come yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering—it has not yet reached the ears of man. Lightning and thunder require time, the light of the stars requires time, deeds require time even after they are done, before they can be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars—and yet it is they who have done it![96]

For Strauss as for Nietzsche, the truth of mimesis and of the founding murder is so shocking that most people, in all times and places, simply will not believe it. The world of the Enlightenment may have been based on certain misconceptions about the nature of humanity, but the full knowledge of these misconceptions can remain the province of a philosophical elite. The successful popularization of such knowledge would be the only thing to fear, and it was in this context that the Straussian, Pierre Manent, launched a ferocious attack on Girard's theory: "If human 'culture' is essentially founded on violence, then [Girard] can bring nothing other than the destruction of humanity in the fallacious guise of non-violence."[97] Girard, in turn, would counter that salvation is no longer to be found in philosophical reticence, because there will come a day when there is no esoteric knowledge left:

> I do think it is necessary for us to engage in the discourse we have been pursuing here. But if we had chosen otherwise, others would have taken up this discourse. And there will be others, in any case, who will repeat what we are in the process of saying and who will advance matters beyond what we have been able to do. Yet books themselves will have no more than minor importance; the events within which such books emerge will be infinitely more eloquent than whatever we write and will establish truths we have difficulty describing and describe poorly, even in simple and banal instances. They are already very simple, indeed too simple to interest our current Byzantium, but these truths will become simpler still; they will soon be accessible to anyone.[98]

For Girard, the knowledge of the founding murder is driven by the historical working of the Judeo-Western revelation. The revelation may be slow

(because it contains a message that humans do not wish to hear), but it is not reversible. For this reason, the decisive difference between Girard and Strauss (or Nietzsche) centers on the question of historicism.

On the level of the individual, even at the end there will still remain a choice of sorts between Jerusalem and Athens. We have Sir Thomas More, a Christian saint, as a helper in making that choice. In his *Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation*, More declares:

> [T]o prove that this life is no laughing time, but rather the time of weeping, we find that our savior himself wept twice or thrice, but never find we that he laughed so much as once. I will not swear that he never did, but at the least wise he left us no example of it. But, on the other side, he left us example of weeping.[99]

The saint knew that the opposite had been true of Socrates, who left us no example of weeping, but left us example of laughter.[100]

* * *

But the world has not yet come to an end, and there is no easy telling how long the twilight of the modern age will endure. What then must be done, by the Christian statesman or stateswoman aspiring to be a wise steward for our time?

The negative answers are straightforward. There can be no return to the archaic world or even to the robust conception of the political envisioned by Carl Schmitt. There can be no real accommodation with the Enlightenment, since so many of its easy bromides have become deadly falsehoods in our time. But also there cannot be a decision to avoid all decisions and to retreat into studying the Bible in anticipation of the Second Coming, for then one will have ceased to be a statesman or stateswoman.

The Christian statesman or stateswoman must diverge from the teachings of Strauss in one decisive respect. Unlike Strauss, the Christian statesman or stateswoman knows that the modern age will not be permanent, and ultimately will give way to something very different. One must never forget that one day all will be revealed, that all injustices will be exposed, and that those who perpetrated them will be held to account.

And so, in determining the correct mixture of violence and peace, the Christian statesman or stateswoman would be wise, in every close case, to side with peace. There is no formula to answer the critical question of what

constitutes a "close case"; that must be decided in every specific instance. It may well be that the cumulative decisions made in all those close instances will determine the destiny of the postmodern world. For that world could differ from the modern world in a way that is much worse or much better—the limitless violence of runaway mimesis or the peace of the kingdom of God.

NOTES

1. Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958), 9–10.
2. Pierre Manent, *The City of Man*, trans. Mark A. LePain (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 27.
3. Manent, *The City*, 27.
4. Manent, *The City*, 35.
5. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 197.
6. John Locke, *Atheism*, in *John Locke: Political Essays*, ed. Mark Goldie, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 245–46.
7. John Locke, *First Treatise of Government*, in *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 214.
8. Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, in *Two Treatises of Government*, 321.
9. Locke, *First Treatise*, 216.
10. Locke, *Second Treatise*, 294 and 352.
11. Locke, *Second Treatise*, 297.
12. Locke, *Second Treatise*, 300.
13. Locke, *Second Treatise*, 362.
14. John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity, with A Discourse of Miracles, and part of A Third Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. abridged, and with an introduction by I. T. Ramsey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 38.
15. Egon Mayer, Barry A. Kosmin, and Ariela Keysar, *The City University of New York American Religious Identification Survey, http://www.gc.cuny.edu/faculty/research_briefs/aris/key_findings.htm* (noting that 76.5 percent of Americans identify themselves as "Christian").
16. Manent, *The City*, 113 (citation and quotation omitted).
17. John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 313–21.
18. Manent, *The City*, 123–24.
19. Manent, *The City*, 169–71.
20. Locke, *Essay*, 391–95.