Revolt Against Modernity

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Labels, Definitions, and Other Forms of Coercion

If you will not have God (and He is a jealous God) you should pay your respects to Hitler or Stalin.

T. S. Eliot

The modem world is disenchanted. The gods have gone, and with them mystery. One cannot help wondering how much the demystification of the cosmos represents the enduring human aspiration to become gods. Eve grasped the forbidden fruit because it represented the power of knowledge that could free humans from dependence upon God. Job, on the other hand, struggled to understand a God who violated the most basic human conceptions of fairness and justice. In their very different ways, both characters engaged in the most basic human struggle to find and accept one's role in the drama of existence. The stories of Eve and Job, though, have an increasingly hollow ring for modems. Those characters played their parts in the context of a palpable god who walked among them, who spoke with them, and whose "existence" established the boundaries of their beliefs. They occupied a world in which almost every event played some role, spoke some message, had meaning in terms of purposes both human and divine. But in our world the questions raised by Job sound much like the little boy who, struggling with his Sunday school lesson, asks, Who made God? We made God, and we killed Him too. Nonetheless, as Job recognized—though he may not have accepted the idea fully—the bearings by which humans orient their lives come from the one or the many who have the power and the will to establish a normative order. If we toss aside Jehovah the burden of establishing order falls on slender human shoulders.

Like Eve, modems believe in the redemptive power of knowledge. Mystery and uncertainty represent nothing more than the unex-
explored territory. In the physical realm knowledge empowers humans to manipulate and transform this world into a more comfortable home. Or, to put the matter another way, humans gain ever-increasing facility in using nature to satisfy human wants. In the social and political worlds, knowledge of behavior allows humans to achieve greater success in satisfying social desires. In both cases moderns understand these desires in terms of a world free from any contingency on divine being or any human responsibility to a normative order not of their creation. The will of the people has replaced the will of God.

The existential fallout from a cosmos purged of gods and spirits is not uniform. Although Western societies no longer sanction belief in any god or act self-consciously on behalf of a god or his principles, many people remain believers. Some live in a richly textured world in which the spiritual and the physical realms coexist. Others accept a more abstract god whose distance from this world makes him little more than an authority to whom they appeal when they near the dangerous nihilistic chasm they believe will swallow them the moment they jettison their abstract god. Still others live without any personal reference to a god. But while gods of various descriptions continue to live among us, they have little purchase on the intellectual life of our society. The same is true concerning our public or social life. In the West one is unaccustomed to hearing substantive discussions about the good or the end of a society or a government. More often than not some vague and widely held assumptions substitute for this discussion. The final authority, insofar as we can escape the elusive language of power, rests with the "people" in some sense of that abstraction. The collective desires of a body of people, as expressed through a pluralistic political structure, provide modern society with ends or goals.

These conditions of the modern West led to an intense antimodernism. The T. S. Eliot quotation at the beginning of this chapter expresses both the thrust of the cognitive claims of many antimodernists and their existential mood. Eliot wrote *The Idea of Christian Society* in 1939 after British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain gave Hitler part of Czechoslovakia. Eliot experienced a "feeling of humiliation," not so much for the specific policy, but over the drift of a civilization in which this policy made sense—a civilizational decline in which he felt "deeply implicated and responsible." He
concluded his book with this explanation of its existential source and motivation: "Was our society, which had always been so assured of its superiority and rectitude, so confident of its unexamined premises, assembled round anything more permanent than a congeries of banks, insurance companies and industries, and had it any beliefs more essential than a belief in compound interest and the maintenance of dividends? Such thoughts as these formed the starting point, and must remain the excuse, for saying what I have to say."

Another way of asking Eliot's primary question is, For what does Western civilization stand? Do Western societies have an "idea" that invests their existence with meaning or purpose? Because liberal democracies like Eliot's beloved England no longer stood for some defined normative order, they had not the stomach to stand up to Hitler. This is what Eliot meant when he said, "If you will not have God you should pay your respects to Hitler or Stalin."

By the end of World War II the social, political, and intellectual deformity of Western thought known as Nazism had become evil incarnate. With Germany in ruins and Nazism vanquished, the entire struggle passed easily into popular history as the classic struggle between good and evil. For a whole range of thinkers, however, the "good war" had heightened their concern for political and moral conundrums once confined to the airy discussions of "intellectuals." For those thinkers equipped with the sensitive moral compass of a T. S. Eliot these conundrums represented nothing less than a challenge to Western civilization. The experiences of the first half of the twentieth century had the effect of presenting the long-standing crisis of the West as an especially urgent matter.

In the decades following the war diverse thinkers sought to understand something they called "modernity." The complicated lines of thought that wrapped around this concept linked this discussion with similar efforts reaching back to Kant. This present book focuses on two scholars, Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, who shared with Eliot the belief that modernity encompassed Nazism, communism, and liberalism. They detected family resemblances in these ideologies, and they labored to lay bare the modern core, the "genetic code" that linked the apparently good sister of liberalism to her violent brothers. In the reified discussion of modernity, the entire cluster of related ideologies belongs to a dysfunctional family. Resting at the existential core of the protagonists of this story was
the fear that despite a stable liberal democracy, America might eventually pay its respects to a Hitler or a Stalin.

LABELS

If the malcontents of modernity diagnose a disease affecting the spiritual, intellectual, political, and social realms they must do so from an understanding of health. A critique of modernity entails some desired alternative. All the same, even the most thoughtful and articulate medical doctor would be hard pressed to define health. The same is true with social and spiritual life. Health emerges as a concept only in the context of a perceived disease. Although sickness does not define health, it certainly provides the occasion for thinking about the matter. As a concept, disease presupposes something normative (health); nonetheless, it should not surprise us that most critics focus upon the easier task of diagnosing the problem. Moreover, we ought to expect critics to find more commonality in their diagnosis than in their prescription.

So it was for Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin. They did not fit into any easily identifiable camp, nor did they share a normative theory. Nonetheless, some label or tag helps locate them in a larger field of critics. They were conservative antimoderns. That is, their antimodernism pointed back toward something lost, a heritage worth recapturing. Unfortunately, the word "conservative" is no sooner uttered than a whole series of images-usually conflicting-shrouds our thinking. The biggest problem with the label is its generalized use in a schema that organizes beliefs in relation to one another on a two-dimensional field. The traditional linear construction of beliefs bounded by two poles has the distinct advantage of relating beliefs to one another in an unambiguous way. To think and speak in this sort of shorthand is not a structural requirement of language but a strategy designed to give one a sense of intellectual surefootedness. The intellectual terrain viewed from this perspective has no hills or dips, only a straight, narrow beam running from left to right. Constricting the intellectual topography to two dimensions brings any number of compatriots together as well as tossing an enormous range of others into a manageable number of camps. Unfortunately, this form of in-
intellectual mapping conceals as much as it exposes, and perhaps for this reason we seem wedded to it.

In the case of Voegelin and Strauss the conservative label presents special problems. Numerous books on American conservatism draw Strauss and Voegelin into the conservative orbit, often without useful or careful qualifications. Voegelin was especially upset when the label was applied to him. In one particularly vigorous response Voegelin upbraided John East for his application of the conservative label to Voegelin's work. He wrote in a personal letter: "I have not spent the time of my life and done my work, in order to amuse and comfort American Conservatives. It is, of course, quite legitimate to write an essay about the reception my work has found among conservatives, but I am afraid a serious treatment of this subject would have to become a satire on the Conservatives." Voegelin wrote the letter in response to an essay that East later incorporated into his book *The American Conservative Movement*. Voegelin accused East, with cause, of taking scattered quotes out of context and pasting them together into a patchwork conservative cloth. "In order to make it complete," Voegelin continued, "you would have had to confront the actual content and purpose of my work, which has nothing to do with conservative predilections.... Why you have left the satire incomplete, I am sure, you will know best yourself. But as a basis for satirical purposes your study merits high praise, and I shall use it sometime." The correspondence with East, of which this was the most caustic letter, demonstrates the great frustration Voegelin experienced in the late 1970s after his work had been misunderstood by politically oriented conservatives for nearly three decades. Voegelin objected primarily to the way labels tended to flatten out his work and to the fact that East and others used his work to buttress a political persuasion he did not openly share. Strauss, for his part, invited an appropriation of his work by those who misunderstood him.

Nonetheless, both men played important roles in the development of a conservative intellectual movement born in the 1950s that retains a pugnacious vitality appropriate to a minority—with the help of several well-financed institutions. The history of American conservative "intellectuals" (a label they abhor) is complicated by alliances of convenience, an ill-advised marriage between cultural conservatives and politically oriented classical liberals, and a popular
expansion of the meaning of the word "conservative." These confusions obscure the very significant differences between such porous groups as traditionalist conservatives, neoconservatives, classical liberals, numerous other hybrids, and an odd assortment of angry men and women. All definitional boundaries seem arbitrary. Even Russell Kirk, whom I take to be the best example of an American conservative-in style and belief-found numerous affinities with cultural critics on the left while supporting politicians on the right, from Barry Goldwater to Ronald Reagan even Patrick Buchanan). Whatever the word may mean, I use it to describe a way of seeing the world: a conservative imagination that contrasts sharply with modern, instrumentalist, ways of thinking.

The model for my own definition is what people often call "traditional conservatism." Strauss and Voegelin were not fully conservatives in this sense, especially considering the reverence conservatives have for the Anglo-American tradition. Rather, in their case, "conservative" modifies antimodernism—it helps locate their version of antimodernism. Nonetheless, an etymological exploration of the word "conservative" should help suggest something about the direction of their thinking. By moving from the most generalized attitude to a reasonably rigid set of beliefs (an ideal type!), the conservative label may help explain the sense in which Strauss and Voegelin moved into the conservative movement without becoming a part of it.

All conservatives reject modernity (which is understood in many different ways) while at the same time wishing to preserve "Western civilization." It is this yearning to preserve what appears terribly threatened that makes them conservatives. But since both of the terms "modern" and "Western civilization" require lengthy explanations, I should outline those views more specifically. What would an ideal conservative believe? I began this section with the metaphor of health and disease applied to social and political life because such language assumes a belief in some normative order or an authoritative standard to which humans are responsible. For this reason one characteristic of most conservatives is a chronic concern for order, or the search for order, or the experience of order.

Since an order transcending human control must be accessible in some measure for it to be of any use to humans, we may accept as a postulate of conservatives that they believe humans can "know"
something about the order that embraces their lives. Consequently, they reject the "modern" restriction of knowledge to the "objective" knowledge obtained through the methods of the physical sciences. More comprehensively, conservatives reject the subject/object dualism that fostered the division of human experiences into the privileged and reliable experiences of the senses (the objective realm) and the suspect and private nonsensual experiences (the realm of the subjective). In contrast to the sterile intellectual universe created by Descartes, in which humans are abstractly separated from the objects of their knowledge and little remains that might constitute knowledge except physical objects and their relationships as well as tautologies, conservatives embrace a participatory theory of knowledge. Accordingly, humans participate in a reality not of their making, a reality with several strata that humans may understand by examining their participation in being. It is meaningless to refer to "objective knowledge," since the only knowledge available to humans comes from inside. Humans are part of that which they seek to know.

With regard to philosophical matters, antimodem conservatives operate within the traditional categories of ontology, epistemology, and anthropology, all three of which have been challenged by recent philosophical moves. Rich variety characterizes conservative philosophical thought, but conservatives share the goal of recapturing what they believe to be essential philosophical questions or problems—the very questions that certain versions of "modernity" have eclipsed by emphasizing the scientifically knowable. Consequently, conservatives characteristically take a "classical" turn, emphasizing the objectives if not always the conclusions of ancient Hellenic philosophy. They seek to return Western thought to the perennial questions that have slipped slowly out of the philosophical horizon, though they remain very real issues in the political and social realms. I will explore the substance of these questions throughout this book.

Related to clearly and traditionally philosophical matters are the "conservative" social and political principles that emerge from the conservative construction of the normative order and of human nature. These two constituents of reality remain constants in an otherwise perpetually changing political and social order. Consequently, conservatives believe in no paradigmatic human political and social
structure, only flexible and general principles learned through cen-
turies of human experience, reason, and, for some, revelation. The
most important principles are: one, the social need for a myth or a
"meta-narrative" to invest a society with a communal sense of pur-
pose and meaning; two, the need to provide members of a society
with a sense of community, belonging, rootedness; three, the social
need for competing nodes of authority (like state, church, family,
guild, union, village) as the context for the development of personal
identity as well as a protection against the aggrandizement of power
by a single authority; four, a recognition of the fundamentally hier-
archical nature of existence and the social need for hierarchy; and
five, the prescriptive roles of tradition, habit, and prejudice as protec-
tion from abstract innovation. Recognition of these conditions
comes from an apperception of the normative order and from a read-
ing of human nature. One common characteristic of these principles
is their nonabstract character. Conservatives begin their thinking
with the social character of humans (in contrast to an abstracted hu-
man in the state of nature) and work through the ways societies have
most effectively met human needs. Even the individual as a human
personality emerges as a product of a social environment—without
society, there are no humans.

Do any conservatives fit this ideal type? Many come very close—
Russell Kirk and Robert Nisbet come to mind. Eric Voegelin and Leo
Strauss clearly differ from the ideal type in important ways. Strauss's
emphasis upon "nature," at first glance, appears to undermine any
order resting upon habit and prescription. However, Strauss's teach-
ings concerning "nature" as a standard serve a conservative function
of undermining historicist or relativist arguments against a norma-
tive order. His motivations were nothing if not "conservative," and
it is no wonder his most popular book, and the book most embraced
and plundered by conservatives, focused upon the problem of natural
right in the modern world. The case of Leo Strauss is instructive be-
cause his early reception by conservatives—many like Kirk later re-
jected him—points to an inherent tension in conservative thought.
Conservatives affirm a normative order while holding human tradi-
tions in high esteem. They affirm an authoritative order that tran-
scends human control while emphasizing that the limits of human
knowledge necessitate a reliance upon developing methods of adapt-
ing to the changing world (tradition, habit, prejudice).
The labeling game can go on forever. What is amazing, however, is how well Voegelin and the teaching of Strauss fit the model. No doubt in the 1950s their books influenced a generation of conservatives. Later disaffection seems to have more to do with religious differences than anything else. Yet the basic structure of their positions retains an essentially conservative cast—at least their philosophical assumptions closely resemble those of traditionalist conservatives. Without question, self-conscious conservatives have found and continue to find much that is instructive in the works of both men. If Strauss and Voegelin did not join the conservative movement, they received honorary memberships—or should I say they were drafted into it? At the very least, both philosophers shared with self-professed conservatives a rejection of modernity. More than that, the philosophical critique of the modern world offered by conservatives since the mid 1950s rests primarily upon the work of Strauss and Voegelin.

THE MEANINGS OF MODERNITY

The word "modern" means more and more these days. Unfortunately, more is less when applied to the currency of a word, as the range of possible meanings expands so far that the word cries out for adjectives. To make matters less clear, scholars increasingly employ the even more elusive words "premodern" and "postmodern" as though they marked some unambiguous cognitive territory familiar to all their listeners and readers. Nonetheless, these confusions should not cloud the fact that thinkers have for some time thought in terms of a historical category called "modern" that separates the present from earlier ages like the ancient era and the medieval era. A consciousness of historical periodization and of distinct differences separating the present era from those that came before is itself a modern notion, and therefore is bound up in any useful definition of the word. More important for our present concern, this consciousness of difference tends to make people reflect about the novelties of their own age and its internal and even subterranean logic.

This self-reflection on the very philosophical or perhaps even mythical foundations of one's civilization has grown steadily since Kant. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have witnessed a pro-
liferating concern about modernity primarily because of the fear that "it" will eventually implode after "reason" has emptied its moral and metaphysical core of meaning. The numerous but related concerns about this possibility may be called "the crisis of modernity." To understand the various meanings that people have given to this crisis, we must stipulate that modernity has a project or goal. One is hard pressed to provide clear temporal boundaries to this process, but the developing confidence of the thinkers of the so-called Enlightenment in the human capacity to know and in due course to control the reality in which humans participate will serve as the modern project (this assumption seems to be nearly universal among those who speak of a crisis of modernity). Ever since the Renaissance, a growing faith in the power of human knowledge has propelled an extensive intellectual examination of almost all beliefs. At first these activities did not threaten ancient assumptions, but the hegemony of the Christian construction of reality did not long remain unchallenged in a skeptical age. By the eighteenth century, a wide range of intellectuals considered themselves free thinkers. They no longer labored under irrational beliefs enjoined on orthodox Christians. Yet even as Voltaire, Paine, and Jefferson challenged the peculiarly Christian doctrines, they assumed and therefore defended the Semitic cosmology that lay beneath. God remained largely unchallenged and undoubted.

Enlightenment confidence rested upon faith in human reason to unlock mysteries long shrouded by superstition. God's great creation would someday give up its secrets, and humans would possess unimagined control. The skepticism that in part cleared the intellectual space for the Enlightenment also cast into doubt the very instrument that was to usher in a new age of human knowledge and control. David Hume, for instance, challenged orthodox beliefs in causation by calling into question the necessary connection between facts. How can we "know" that A caused B just by noting that B followed A? Kant salvaged faith in human reason by restricting the realm of rational inquiry to phenomena. He saved reason by eliminating metaphysics from its orbit (understanding metaphysics in a very broad way). The rich and confusing debate that followed stretched to many fields of inquiry but returned always to the questions, What and how can we know? Kant saved reason at an awful cost.
To this crisis of rationality we must add the related phenomenon of a crisis of faith. As faith in "science" grew, concern abounded over the more clearly human problems of meaning, morality, and metaphysics. For an increasing number of intellectuals in the nineteenth century, religion became a matter of private belief about imponderables. Without the sanction of reason how could one speak of "knowledge" about God, morality, or transcendental teleologies? The matter grew more precarious as various evolutionary theories challenged the very Semitic cosmology that was so central to Western self-understanding. Whereas earlier challenges to religion had focused upon particular Christian doctrines, evolution went to the heart of the Semitic cosmology of God and creation by accounting for life in all its variety and plenitude. Belief in God became obsolete.

These challenges to past verities spawned numerous attempts to regain certainty. But so long as these efforts progressed using modern notions of rationality, the area about which humans could speak with confidence would grow very small. Certainty achieved at the cost of a self-imposed silence concerning the most important human issues hardly seemed satisfactory. In the late nineteenth century, a group of philosophers of what James Kloppenberg called the "via media" began to seek a way to live with the contingency and uncertainty of the modern world. Knowledge became a human tool for making our way in the world. Rejecting more appeals to some transcendental norm, or to any form of ontology, these philosophers made the operable words of human society like "good," "just," "right," and even "knowledge" into contingent and historical artifacts. They recognized the need to address the social and political matters of meaning, purpose, and value, but they did not accept the older forms of dealing with these concerns. Human matters were now purely human matters.

These constructions of modernity as a philosophical problem developed alongside other concerns. Modernity also meant revolution (best expressed by the French Revolution) as a means to re-create utterly human social and political life. Some people used the word in reference to large and impersonal processes like industrialization, urbanization, bureaucratization, and collectivization. Critics of modernity often attributed these processes to the Enlightenment attempt to use reason to control every aspect of human life, an attempt that bore great if bitter fruit in the scientific revolutions that followed. The relationship between humans and nature—or at least hu-
man attitudes about this relationship—have changed, making nature the servant of human needs.

With regard to the more purely philosophical debates, Voegelin and Strauss rejected root and branch the "modern" categories perpetuated since Descartes. Much like the philosophers of the via media, both men accepted a more holistic understanding of human experience. However, they extended their analysis to a normative center. All humans experience what Voegelin called a "primordial community of being" structured by four identifiable constituents: "God and man, world and society." The universality of this structure provides an ahistorical construction of human reality, though any understanding of its structure is historical. As an actor or participant in being, humans have the task of making sense of their individual and collective lives "in terms of ends divine and human." Antimodern conservatives believe that the philosophical investigation of the human experience of reality is a science and that we can claim "knowledge" about our experience of God just as we can claim "knowledge" about our experience of the "world." In all cases our knowledge is incomplete and open to revision, but the structure we examine is unchanged so long as we remain human.

This understanding of the crisis of modernity places the emphasis upon constricting the horizon of investigation—the limiting of "science" to phenomena. Because conservatives believe that humans belong to an order not of their making, they understand the paradigmatic human pursuit to be a search for attunement to this order. Because modernity developed through a restriction that eclipsed the normative order, conservatives saw modern attempts at order as destined to create unprecedented social and existential disorder. This "egophanic revolt," as Voegelin labeled it, led to revolutions, rational planning, and more generally to increasingly collective attempts to ameliorate human problems. The rationalization and collectivization of human energies, first by capitalists and then by states, created an ugly industrial and urban landscape, a polluted earth, a mass society, a homogenized culture, and, paradoxically, a deep sense of homelessness in a world entirely under human control. These are the fruits of a society driven by a mania to control and master, a society no longer chastened by a belief in a creator who has given into human hands the husbandry of his creation.

Because the dangers of modernity served as the common ingredi-
ent in the thinking of Strauss and Voegelin, the biographical sketches that follow trace the evolution of their critiques. These critiques, of course, are investigated much more thoroughly in later chapters, but the contrast that follows exposes the broad outline of the themes that dominate this book.

ERIC VOEGELIN

If philosophers were judged on the incomprehensibility of their work, Voegelin could be compared with the likes of Hegel. Voegelin's philosophical explorations taxed language to bear the weighty content of his insight. He could advance only as far as his language would allow him. Im.passes forced Voegelin to seek new words, not simply to convey his thought, but as tools to pursue a line of inquiry. Voegelin's linguistic tools are precise, and for that reason they are not always clear to others. His neologisms express something no other words convey and therefore tax the reader to understand his always precise meanings. Voegelin wrote to understand, a sort of vehicle for his philosophical journey. The vast written record of this journey (both published and unpublished) is rich, but only to the person willing to labor over virtually every word and to engage earnestly in the same journey.

For Voegelin, modernity is the age of ideology, and by ideology he meant a closed intellectual system in which human knowledge serves as a means of achieving earthly felicity. This intellectual closure is not restricted to identifiable ideologues but to varying degrees affects the entire culture of the West. Voegelin's reflections on Hitler help clarify the philosopher's meaning: "The phenomenon of Hitler is not exhausted by his person. His success must be understood in the context of an intellectually or morally ruined society in which personalities who otherwise would be grotesque, marginal figures can come to public power because they superbly represent the people who admire them. Voegelin's indictment rests with the German people rather than Hitler; German society had so decayed that Hitler could become the spiritual representative of the people."

Born in the first year of the twentieth century (1901) Voegelin's life spanned a number of ideological clashes. He grew up in Germany and Austria, where he received a classical education in a Realgymnasium, which emphasized language (he studied Latin, English, and Italian),
physics, and mathematics. Because of the excitement generated by the Russian Revolution, Voegelin used his time before entering university to read *Das Kapital*. "Being a complete innocent in such matters," Voegelin reflected many years later, "I was of course convinced by what I read, and I must say that from August of 1919, to about December of that year I was a Marxist. By Christmas the matter had worn off," with the assistance of university classes in economic theory. Voegelin flirted with an ideology only this one time, he proclaimed, but the problem it posed in his world became central to his work.

When Voegelin matriculated at the University of Vienna in 1919 to pursue a doctorate in political science (*Doctor rerum politicarum*), he entered perhaps the most intellectually energized atmosphere in Europe. In economics, "the Austrian school" begun by Eugen Boehm-Bawberk continued into the second and third generation, including the young Ludwig von Mises (and, as a student, Fredrick von Hayek). In physics there was Moritz Schlick (and his Vienna Circle); in law, Hans Kelsen; and similar luminaries in psychology, art, and philosophy. Perhaps more important for Voegelin's intellectual development were the very talented students and young professors who pursued their high-octane discussions in various non-or semi-formal ways. Voegelin tells of one group of which he was a member (*Geistkreis*, spiritual or intellectual circle) that met once a month to listen to and then "tear to pieces" a paper presented by a member of the group. Voegelin presented more papers than any other member and rather enjoyed the fierce but amicable game they played. And he played the game very well. One friend characterized Voegelin as having a "fiendish erudition and the ability to take off vertically from any question whatever, to disappear within minutes in the theoretical ionosphere, leaving a trail of recondite references behind."

Voegelin worked on his doctorate, which he received in 1922, under the direction of Hans Kelsen, a neo-Kantian professor of law who drafted the Austrian Constitution (1920), and Othmar Spann, a romanticist much influenced by German idealism. Voegelin tried to puzzle through the competing philosophic schools vying for attention in central Europe and was influenced early on by his professor Hans Kelsen, whose Pure Theory of Law had made him famous. Kelsen operated within the neo-Kantian categories worked out by Hermann Cohen of Marburg. The problem for Voegelin with this form of neo-Kantianism was its restrictive method, which "deter-
mined the field of science by the method used in its exploration."

In Kelsen's case political theory (Staatslehre) became the theory of law (Rechtslehre), making everything beyond the scope of the theory of law outside the realm of political theory.

Another important early influence was Max Weber, perhaps the most imposing intellectual figure in Germany and Austria at the time. Reading Weber reinforced Voegelin's animus for ideology. Weber did offer a useful distinction between ethics of intention and ethics of responsibility. Ideologues are blinded by their heady goals and do not consider the immediate effects of their actions, which they hope will usher in the desired future. Voegelin emphasized that "no excuse for the evil consequences of moralistic action could be found in the morality or nobility of one's intentions. A moralistic end does not justify immorality of action."

In other areas, however, Voegelin found Weber's work problematic. In an attempt to make social science a science, Weber restricted the role of the scientist to an exploration of cause and effect. Like Kelsen's neo-Kantianism, this restriction amounted to the method dictating the subject, a sort of reductionism (which became legion among various positivists) that Voegelin found most unsatisfying. He wanted the realm of science to be much broader and applied to all areas of human experience. He wanted the questions scientists ask to be more important.

During the mid 1920s, Voegelin studied in the United States as a Laura Spellman Rockefeller Fellow. "These two years in America," he wrote, "brought the great break in my intellectual development." During his first year he studied at Columbia University, taking classes from, among others, John Dewey. Through Dewey, Voegelin came into contact with the English common sense tradition, which sent him working back to Thomas Reid and Sir William Hamilton.

Even during this first year, America's rich philosophical heritage inoculated him against "the methodological environment" of central Europe. During his second year in the United States he divided his time between Harvard, where he was influenced by Alfred North Whitehead (a visiting professor from England), and Wisconsin, where he studied with John R. Commons. One other intellectual influence of these years was the works of George Santayana. From all these experiences Voegelin wrote the book On the Form of the American Mind (1928). He had left Vienna a provincial; he re-
turned a cosmopolitan. After his American sojourn, the raging debates that had once been so important to him left him cold.

Voegelin returned to Vienna (1929), after an additional year in France, to take a position as lecturer at the University of Vienna (later, associate professor). Already the environment was much changed, with increasing ideological strife and National Socialism's growing influence in Germany and Austria. Voegelin began working on subjects related to National Socialism such as examining race doctrines, especially the biological theories that supported them. He produced three books—Race and State, The Race Idea in Intellectual History, and Political Religions—each of which undermined Nazi theories. Because of the political climate these books had short lives, the second book was removed from circulation by its Berlin publisher in 1933, the same year it came into print. These books would still play a very important role in Voegelin's life, especially when the Nazis came goose-stepping into Vienna in 1938. Voegelin's work on the race myth and his well-known dislike for ideologies in general, and National Socialism in particular, made him a target for the Gestapo. He escaped to Zurich the same day his wife confronted a Gestapo agent at their door. Both Voegelin and his wife made their way to the United States, leaving behind most of their possessions, though he secured his library.

Once in the United States, Voegelin bounced around, moving from Harvard to Bennington College to the University of Alabama, until he finally settled at Louisiana State University in 1942. He began working on a massive project bearing the title, "The History of Political Ideas," but in 1945, after having written over four-thousand typed pages, Voegelin came to the conclusion that the study was theoretically flawed. "It dawned on me that the conception of a history of ideas was an ideological deformation of reality. There were no ideas unless there were symbols of immediate experience. Moreover, one could not handle under the title 'ideas' an Egyptian Coronation ritual." Ideas are secondary constructions that depend upon experience.

Voegelin did not first understand how he should proceed, and he dropped the project. He began afresh in 1951 when he delivered the Walgreen Lectures in Chicago, published later under the title, The New Science of Politics: An Introduction (1952). Really a sort of prolegomenon to his magisterial series Order and History, this book performed two related services. In it, Voegelin examined the contemporary state of political science and how it had sunk to this
point, and he attempted a restoration of premodern political theory. The work served both as a declension story and as an introduction to a "new science of politics" that is rather old. It was, on the whole, an arrogantly written book. Voegelin dismissed without so much as an argument whole schools of thought while casting his own work as more "scientific." This assurance of his own position lasted his entire career, but he also displayed great courage in rejecting some parts of his earlier work when he discovered that they were flawed.

For the rest of his life Voegelin worked on what amounts to a history of consciousness. Especially important works, which stand like signposts marking his intellectual journey, are the five volumes of Order and History! volumes 1-3 were printed in 1956-1957, volume 4 in 1974, and volume 5 in 1987); Science, Politics, and Gnosticism!German edition in 1959 and the English edition in 1968); and especially Anamnesis!German edition in 1966, a somewhat altered edition in English in 1978). These works represent Voegelin's attempt to overcome the theoretical problems he had detected while writing "The History of Political Ideas" in the 1940s. No brief summary of this body of literature is possible, but I will discuss this phase of Voegelin's work at greater length later.

In 1958, after the first three volumes of Order and History had been published, Voegelin left Louisiana State to become the director of the Institute for Political Science and a professor at the University of Munich, where he stayed until 1969. In that year he became the Henry Salvatori Distinguished Scholar at the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace at Stanford University. In 1974 he retired, but he continued to live in the San Francisco, Bay area, still teaching and lecturing, until his death in 1985.

In Voegelin's copious works one finds numerous pages about "modernity" and the conditions for its emergence. His clearest and simplest, though not especially thorough, account appears in The New Science of Politics. To put the matter briefly, modernity is a gnostic revolt against reality. Voegelin chose the word "gnostic" because it refers to claims about esoteric knowledge, knowledge that saves, but the problem is that most people associate the word with the infamous group of early Christians who were known as Gnostics. Voegelin, however, intended no such specific reference. Gnosticism, in the Voegelian sense, is a belief in the power of knowledge to transform reality, to create earthly perfection. It refers, moreover, to an existential core that
has three primary components: one, a strong sense of alienation, a feeling that some essential part of one's humanity is unfulfilled; two, a revolt against the conditions that create alienation; and three, a belief that human knowledge is sufficient to overcome these conditions, that humans have the power to transform themselves, or both.

Every society requires a symbolic expression of reality to give meaning to its existence—and to the existence of its members. These symbolic expressions emerge from human experience and subsist until a "leap in being" provides a deeper understanding of reality, through the medium of a single person. All symbolic expressions are inadequate because they emerge from human participation within the reality they wish to understand. Therefore, pressures springing from human experience demonstrate the uncertainty of human understanding, spawning the perpetual dream of grasping the whole of reality with the certainty of a god, a creator. Given the anxiety of human life, torn between the material world and the pneumatic pull from a palpable spiritual source, the greatest temptation is to believe in a symbolic expression of a deformed but fully intelligible reality. Modernity is just such a deformation.

The Christian order, articulated best by St. Augustine, had radically separated the mundane (earthly) from the divine (a result Voegelin called de-divinized) by emphasizing the eternal destiny of humans. Gone were the polytheistic societies in which the divine and the mundane commingled in the world. The Christian order separated the mundane from the divine, which secured the sense of human limitation while promising perfection in another world. Modernity, as Voegelin meant it, is the process by which the world is redivinized and the uncertainty of faith (as expressed in Hebrews 11:1) is replaced with the certainty of ideology.

Joachim of Flora, in the twelfth century, began the gnostic revolt by creating the "aggregate of symbols which govern the self-interpretation of modern political society to this day." Joachim developed a new conception of history around a trinitarian eschatology, in which history is divided into three stages or periods, each represented by a member of the 'Innity. Each age is progressively more spiritual than the previous and the third, scheduled to begin in 1260, "would bring the perfect spiritual life." This tripartite progressive view of history became a standard way for ideologues to view historical reality, which culminated with the third and perfect period. Unlike Augustine's
sharp separation of the mundane and the divine, this view of history has the divine working in history to produce some utopian end time (later, the divine collapses into the human). History has a meaning that the seer (prophet!) can understand. There would be many seers.

This sort of gnostic symbolism proved very attractive since it resolved the tension necessarily associated with faith (it not only explained history but gave an inevitability to it). "Gnosticism," as Voegelin used the word, represented an attempt to alter the inevitable human perspective, from participant in a whole not of one's making (seeing from the inside!) to observer and participant, having access to some Archimedean point. Ideologies require this assumed perspective because they suppose a closed system about which they have knowledge. Gnosticism is a closing of the soul and the construction of an alternative reality, a counterexistential dream world."

The process that began with Joachim culminated in twentieth-century totalitarianism. "The immanentization of the Christian eschaton made it possible to endow society in its natural existence with a meaning which Christianity denied to it. And totalitarianism of our time must be understood as journey's end of the Gnostic search for a civil society. Voegelin's construction of "modern" history turns on the importance of the new symbolization that Joachim created; few scholars have given so obscure a figure such a central place in the drama of history. The distance between this medieval monk and Hitler is vast and filled with numerous figures who, infected with a belief in the saving power of knowledge, have played their roles in the deadening story of modernity. According to Voegelin's account, each of these thinkers, in very different ways, believed that he had obtained the knowledge necessary to transform this earthly world of woe into a paradise. Those dispossessed of utopian imagery nonetheless projected a progressive future fueled by human knowledge and control over the environment. Of all the gnostic paths the most enduring is "science." Modern science is a visible tool of "progressive" change, and ever since the nineteenth century, "science" has been the primary repository of human knowledge and faith. The church, with its uncertainties, could not challenge "science," which offered people increased control over their lives. The dream of supreme knowledge and control works in the modern era to seduce people into believing in an ideology in the same way the serpent seduced Eve.

Gnosticism, Voegelin admitted, unleashed phenomenal creative
energy. The attempt to remake the world "produced the truly magnificent spectacle of western progressive society"—but the price of such a spectacle was high.

The death of the spirit is the price of progress. Nietzsche revealed this mystery of the Western apocalypse when he announced that God was dead and that He had been murdered. This Gnostic murder is constantly committed by the men who sacrifice God to civilization. The more fervently all human energies are thrown into the great enterprise of salvation through world-immanent action, the farther the human beings who engage in this enterprise move away from the life of the spirit. And since the life of the spirit is the source of order in man and society, the very success of a Gnostic civilization is the cause of its decline. 18

"The order of history emerges out of the history of order," Voegelin wrote at the beginning of Order and History. In its historical dimension, human existence exhibits an intelligible structure. Humans have always tried to understand the reality of which they form a part and to orient themselves to their conception of the whole. The history of order is the history of human societies symbolically expressing their experiences of order. Even though those symbolic expressions differ with regard to their grasp of separate structures in reality, they each express the same reality. Attempts to deform that reality, to ignore one's experience of reality, is an attempt to escape the tension that is necessarily part of any honest approach to the human condition. But reality remains constant, and the structure of a humanly fabricated reality can only bend so far before it breaks. One senses while reading Voegelin's work that he believed the ideological worlds were about to collapse under the pressure of reality. The struggle for a new symbolization of order was beginning, and he expected that, like Moses and Plato, he was contributing to a further differentiation of reality and a more adequate symbolic order.

LEO STRAUSS

No thinker was more oriented to "the crisis of the West" than Leo Strauss. One may see his entire career as a project with two parts: exposing the "modern project" and recovering classical philosophy. Such an enormous effort resists attempts at quick summary, made the more
difficult by the elusive methods for which Strauss is infamous. Strauss strove to teach the teachable how to read, which is to say how to read the works of great philosophers. One must read Strauss the way he read the greats. In his method lies part of his answer to the modern problem. This is all very cryptic. His methods differ profoundly from his contemporary political philosophers, and his messages are "guarded by seven seals." To understand his teachings requires patience and a bracketing of traditional "modern" categories. Strauss's work is internally coherent, but one must learn the rules by which Strauss operated. We can begin to understand the development of these rules, this private language, by tracing Strauss's intellectual development.

Two facts about Strauss's birth in 1899 would prove very important in shaping his intellectual perspective. He was born Jewish and German, and the conjunction of these two facts with the cultural, intellectual, and political upheaval of the first half of the twentieth century placed Strauss in a rich, complex, and lively cultural and intellectual universe and a political context that challenged him to examine the assumptions that dominated his universe in light of especially compelling and personal questions and problems. From his first book, published in 1930, to his final posthumous work (published in 1989, sixteen years after his death), one can trace an ongoing engagement with a single problem—the problem of modernity, a symbol for the congeries of problems he faced as an intellectual in the highly charged environment of Weimar and Nazi Germany. More precisely, modernity meant the rejection of the method and goals of classical political philosophy. Strauss's method of addressing—if not always answering—the problems was to engage in a conversation with the most important and interesting philosophers of the tradition that had handed him this conundrum. To understand Strauss requires that one understand the tradition he inherited and the conventional interpretation of the seminal figures of that tradition. No short cuts; Strauss's work is too elliptical for that.

Strauss was raised an orthodox Jew in Kirchhain, Hessen, in south-central Germany, a rural area north of Frankfurt. He was educated at the Gymnasium Philippinum in Marburg and graduated from there in 1917. After World War I, in which he served in the German army, Strauss studied philosophy at several schools, including the University of Hamburg where he earned his Ph.D. under the direction of Ernst Cassirer. Strauss continued his education after his doctorate !which he took at the age of
twenty-two) by studying and doing research at schools across Germany, including Freiburg where he had brief contact with Husserl and Heidegger. In most German universities philosophical debate was highly charged and erudite. No single school of thought predominated, but common to most was a sense of uncertainty, with roots stretching back as least as far as Kant. But the uncertainty of the twentieth century appeared more ominous because it had spread from the cloistered ranks of philosophers to a larger portion of the population, though in popularized or vulgarized form. The experiences of World War I and the chaos that followed further heightened the anxiety many thinkers were experiencing. Strauss's commitments in this debate are not clear, though he seems to have held, and in some respects retained, neo-Kantian views. More important, he was much influenced by Husserl's phenomenology and his attempt at a new ontology.

In 1925, Strauss accepted a position at the Academy of Jewish Research (Akademie für Wissenschaft des Judentums) in Berlin. His research there led to his first book and the first expression of his lifelong problem. The book was *Die Religionskritik Spinozas als Grundlage seiner Bibelwissenschaft* (first published in 1930; published in English in 1965 with the title *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*); his lifelong problem: "The theologico-political problem has remained the theme of my studies." As Strauss's student Allan Bloom correctly noted, Strauss's early work on Jewish thought, of which the book on Spinoza was the first fruit, was influenced by his concern for "the Jewish problem." Should Jews try to assimilate, or should they try to establish a separate Jewish state? Strauss seemed unwilling to embrace either option. Bloom wrote: "Strauss, while accepting the Zionist view of assimilation, wondered whether a strictly political and secular response to the Jewish situation in Europe was sufficient and whether a Jewish state that rejected the faith in the Biblical revelation would have any meaning." His belief in the inevitable conflict between philosophy and revelation exacerbated this theologico-political problem. Depending upon incompatible assumptions, these two ways of looking at the world could never be made compatible—although their tension is the genius of Western civilization. What relationship should religious orthodoxy have to the political order? If, as Strauss assumed, the life of intransigent inquiry (the life of the philosopher) and the life of faith were ultimately incompatible, and if the political order depended upon a minimum orthodoxy to provide it with purposes and moral beliefs,
what becomes of a society in which citizens cling to revelation while accepting philosophical assumptions not clearly compatible with orthodox religion?

To help understand such issues, Strauss turned to the famous Jewish philosopher whose work helped undermine faith in revelation, Spinoza. Although Strauss found that Spinoza examined religious issues with the methods and assumptions of philosophy (and thus found an acceptance of the literal teachings of the Torah intellectually untenable), Strauss emphasized the different assumptions grounding the two positions, insulating each from an examination based on the methods of the other. Only by accepting the assumptions of philosophy can one find persuasive a critique of revelation on those grounds.

Wishing to understand the attempt by some people to reconcile philosophy and revelation, Strauss turned to the medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides. Reading Maimonides was unlike reading Spinoza and other modern philosophers. Spinoza sought to expose the fallacies underlying religious belief in an effort to ground human understanding on a more secure epistemological base. He wrote, consequently, with the rigor and precision appropriate to the philosopher. Maimonides, by contrast, wrote without the driving clarity of Spinoza, leaving the careful reader confused. A superficial reading of Maimonides' work leaves a very clear impression that he was reconciling faith and reason—or at least attempting such a reconciliation. However, Strauss came to believe that Maimonides was up to much more, that he had no intention of reconciling the incompatible but wanted to make philosophy appear to the nonphilosopher as an ally to faith. Someone attending carefully to Maimonides' text stumbles over innumerable small things—contradictions or highly ambiguous phrases or shifts in the meanings of words according to context. Maimonides placed these stumbling blocks in the text, Strauss argued, to arrest the attention of the careful reader. Strauss had discovered a way of writing that presents two messages: the politically useful message and the true message. Strauss decided that if he wanted to understand Maimonides as Maimonides understood himself— he would have to learn a new way of reading.

These philosophical "discoveries" developed slowly and in a political context that heightened their significance. The Weimar regime posed problems for Strauss well before the rise of Hitler. This first "liberal democracy" in Germany's history arose during a period of moral, reli-
gious, and epistemological decay. The malaise extended from a widespread naive relativism among the general public to a radical historicism among intellectuals who understood knowledge to be a social construction, contextualized thought bound to a specific time and, to a lesser degree, place. For Strauss, such beliefs result in political suicide, since this way of thinking excludes from the realm of the knowable the most important political questions concerning the good, the just. They lead, he argued, to nihilism, at least insofar as political matters are involved. The state in which citizens accept these limitations is no longer bound by any conception of the good. Power alone remains.

In 1931 Strauss received a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship that supported him while he did research in France and England. After this research grant ended in 1933, Strauss elected not to return to a Germany, which had been transformed in the interim into the Third Reich, but remained in England to complete his book, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis* (1936). Like his book on Spinoza, this examination of Hobbes's thought proceeds conventionally and does not yet incorporate Strauss's developing ideas about esoteric writing. In due course, he made his way to the United States (1937) where he was affiliated first with Columbia University and then the new School for Social Research in New York City, where he remained until 1948.

Strauss made few references to the Nazi regime or its deeds, but the holocaust profoundly affected him. He understood, to simplify a good bit, Nazism to be the fruit of modernity. Heidegger's Nazi affiliation only exposed more graphically the pernicious drift of modern thought, and for Strauss, Heidegger symbolized modern nihilism. But the thinking that had made Hitler possible had not gone away. The philosophical, political, and theological developments of the past several centuries were unaffected by the Nazi defeat, so Strauss's call for a recovery of ancient wisdom was no academic or sterile intellectual exercise. For Strauss, the fate of the West rested on the outcome of his attempt to recover political philosophy.

In 1949 Strauss moved to the University of Chicago (where he later became the Robert Maynard Hutchins Distinguished Service Professor), and it was there that he made his name in the United States and cultivated a number of students who, over the years, have demonstrated amazing admiration for and loyalty to their mentor. They and their students evolved into an identifiable, though fractious "school" in the political science profession. Strauss's tenure at the University of
Chicago represents his richest period of scholarship. Beginning with On 'lyranny (actually published a year before his move to Chicago), the characteristic Strauss style, method, and message began to emerge. Two quotes from the introduction of On 'fyranny help demonstrate the important message and the method of Strauss's work.21

Socratic rhetoric is emphatically just. It is animated by the spirit of social responsibility. It is based on the premise that there is a disproportion between the intransigent quest for truth and the requirements of society, or that not all truths are always harmless. Society will always try to tyrannize thought. Socratic rhetoric is the classic means for ever again frustrating the attempt.22

In explaining writings like the Hiero, one has to engage in long-winded and sometimes repetitious considerations which can arrest attention only if one sees the purpose, and it is necessary that this purpose should reveal itself in its proper place, which cannot be at the beginning. If one wants to establish the precise meaning of a subtle hint, one must proceed in a way which comes dangerously close to the loathsome business of explaining a joke.23

By this point in his career Strauss had adopted Maimonides' methods by stressing the different needs of philosophers (those engaged in an intransigent quest for truth) and society. This division of the needs of the few from the many became central to Strauss's thought. Although society needs beliefs, the philosopher brings every opinion into question. These incompatible needs require that one must accommodate the other. The few must bow to the needs of the many. Politically wise philosophers choose to do so because they will not long survive in a society whose citizens hold strongly to their beliefs. Moreover, if these socially useful beliefs begin to decay the society will crumble, leaving disorder (and philosophers, like everyone else, desire order). Therefore, in order to pursue their quest, which usually includes teaching the few with sufficient spiritual stamina to be philosophers, they must present themselves to the society as good citizens, faithful to the religious beliefs that ground the political and social order. In their writings, consequently, they must present their message in such a manner as to conceal from the many their true teaching while leaving sufficient evidence for the careful
reader to uncover the esoteric message. The second quotation above indicates not only Strauss's conviction that ancient philosophers so wrote but that one must read him in the same manner. 

With the publication of Natural Right and History in 1950, Strauss emerged as a major influence in political theory. This book proved especially influential for conservatives because of its full frontal assault on modernity as well as its defense of ancient categories so dear to conservative hearts. The book's simplicity cloaks a rich teaching, and only introductory observations are possible here. The title presents the essential dualism. Natural right developed in Greek philosophy as a result of the discovery of nature. By assuming that all things have a nature, some unchangeable characteristics that define them as a class, it is possible to consider what is right by nature, i.e., what conforms to nature (a very different meaning than the phrase "natural right" has today). For a human to live well he must live according to his nature, and since the defining characteristic of humans is their reason, naturally humans should live a contemplative life. In political terms natural right refers to proper governing, with the constituent parts of the polis performing their proper roles (roles for which nature has given them ability). It follows, then, that political philosophy is the attempt to discover the nature of the polis. This is not a simple normative claim with an ought, for to discover the nature of something and the consequences of acting in violation of that nature does not enjoin one to conform to that nature.

Strauss traced in Natural Right and History the alteration that early modern philosophers had made in the natural right tradition until, finally, the entire concept of nature had dissolved as a useful assumption. In response, modern philosophers replaced nature with History, a developmental view of life that emphasizes change rather than unchanging and defining characteristics. In Strauss's work, History often stands for historicism, the most advanced form of relativism. In modern thinking, philosophy no longer is possible because philosophy is the quest to know nature, or the eternal. According to Strauss, for moderns nothing is unchanging except change.

Strauss's primary critique of modernism is contained in Natural Right and History, though he had much to add in his numerous books that followed. At the end of his career—by which time he had moved to St. Johns College in Maryland where he was Scott Buchanan Distinguished Scholar in residence—he focused entirely upon the classical
texts, especially Plato's work. He had well established the failure and the flaws of modernity, and now wished to engage in a fuller examination of classical philosophy, not in order to imitate it but to recapture the innocence of those beginning discoveries.  

This short intellectual biography highlights the basic assumptions Strauss associated with "modernity," but a more synthetic account of his mature thought should provide the necessary rudiments for later sections where I take up the highly controversial specifics. No brief overview could possibly include an adequate commentary on the profundity of Strauss's views.

Strauss often wrote of the modern "project." The implication of this language is that modernity is characterized by goals that suggest a conscious break with classical understanding. The makers of modernity, therefore, took their bearings from the premodern tradition they rejected. The first such break came from Machiavelli. The tradition against which Machiavelli consciously revolted was characterized by certain beliefs and goals. First, political philosophy is the quest for the best political order, the order "most conducive to the practice of virtue" and in which each person gets his due and occupies his rightful place according to his nature. Second, chance is necessary for the establishment of the best political order because it requires the very unlikely circumstances when philosophers possess or greatly influence political power. And third, nature dictates the proper limits on humans—they cannot overcome their nature. Machiavelli subverted these beliefs and goals by rejecting nature—that is, a nonhuman standard that provides the model for human aspiration. In this way he lowered the goals of political philosophy and of human society. Machiavelli began with humans as he found them rather than as they should be and thought that leaders should seek to take care of basic human needs rather than their highest aspirations. Machiavelli also dismissed the role of chance (fortuna). Humans make their own chances. In some restricted sense leaders have full control of their destinies, and so long as they devote their energies to human desires instead of "the good," then leaders can achieve a stable political order. Machiavelli reduced the scope of political philosophy from the quest for the good or the natural to a technical problem of achieving a political order best suited to satisfy human desires.

Machiavelli's revolt produced changes in two areas of human thought. By rejecting nature as a standard or ideal, the word changed meaning as
did the science meant to study it. Nature became something to understand, to manipulate, to conform to human needs (rather than humans conforming to nature). Such an understanding of nature produced a science focused upon using nature to remove physical limitations. After Machiavelli, a teleological understanding of nature grew increasingly precarious, and from Bacon and other Enlightenment thinkers to the natural and social sciences of the twentieth century, the revolution begun by Machiavelli ended with a frenzied attempt to control nature. The second change Machiavelli inspired occurred in political philosophy. His primary heir, Thomas Hobbes, elevated the lowest of human ends—self-preservation—to the highest political goal. In the process, natural right became individual right, first a right of self-preservation and then rights as members of a state to relief from some burdens. This stream of thought, leading through John Locke, became the source of liberal democracy, which, springing from the earliest manifestation of modern thought, would prove far less vulnerable to the self-destructive tendencies of later modern political systems.

A second "wave" of modernity, more radical than the first, had its beginnings in the thought of Rousseau. Unlike those in the first wave, in which techniques of satisfying basic human demands in the context of self-interested individuals became the focus, Rousseau sought to achieve a transformation of human nature. In the state of nature humans were "subhuman" and have acquired their measure of humanity through the historical process. Human development springs, not from reason, but from will—the general will, "a will inherent and immanent in properly constituted society takes the place of transcendent natural law." Rousseau linked humanity with historical development rather than with nature and reason. His ideas would find a more complete development through Kant and Hegel and would provide the source for the second modern form of government, communism.

The third and most radical wave of modernity Strauss associated with Nietzsche and Heidegger. Nietzsche also rejected nature and timeless standards in favor of historical development, but unlike Rousseau or Hegel, Nietzsche believed this development had no reason to it, no teleology, no progress. Nietzsche saw the nihilism in the universe, leaving only power and the will to power. The historicism of this third wave did not allow for knowledge of eternal relations, there being nothing about which one might have knowledge—except the knowledge of this state of affairs. This denial of standards makes intellectually un-
tenable any ardent defense of moral ideals {though some people, like Max Weber, tried}. The true crisis of modernity, then, is the inability to affirm or believe in anything or any goal or ideal. Heidegger, for instance, could find no moral grounds upon which to condemn Hitler. To Strauss, Heidegger's amorality was an obscene abdication of responsibility, exposing a failure of nerve in the greatest philosopher of the century. No matter the brilliance of Heidegger as a philosopher, he failed utterly as a political philosopher, which is to say as a politically responsible philosopher.

Strauss argued that the practical consequences of this radical historicism was Nazism. But modernity did not crumble in 1945. It remains in the liberal democracies. He was unclear about the relative importance of this virus, since liberal democracies appear to have sufficient "premodern" influences to protect them. Still, the danger is great and the stakes high. A healthy political philosophy, one grounded on nature rather than history, would provide the best intellectual bulwark against modernity. If Strauss may be said to have had a political goal, it was to reorient political philosophy in the West.

The modern crisis was the focal point for Strauss's work rather than his point of departure. This summary provides the basic public outline of the story he had to tell, but the twists of interpretation and the turns of Strauss's own esoteric message must wait for later chapters. Here we have Strauss the political philosopher; Strauss the philosopher remains as yet partially hidden.

Strauss's and Voegelin's critiques of modernity matured in the context of the unprecedented prosperity of postwar America. Why? Had not the war, a titanic struggle between ideologies, destroyed the most dangerous form of modernity? Perhaps their critiques make sense as versions of anticommunism. Both philosophers were undeniably anticommunists, but their critiques focused upon liberals and the kind of society they were creating in the United States and the West. The political stability and economic prosperity of postwar America hid, they believed, a deeper angst and a fear that the center would not hold. America would take a course similar to the totalitarian states if it could not shore up its moral center. Liberal democracy in the United States required, they believed, a reinvigorated idea or purpose.