

## Strauss References to Swift and Gulliver

compiled by Bernhardt Trout and Svetozar Minkov

### From Books:

*Persecution and the Art of Writing* (title chapter), paragraphs 1-4 (originally published 1941)

In a considerable number of countries which, for about a hundred years, have enjoyed a practically complete freedom of public discussion, that freedom is now suppressed and replaced by a compulsion to coordinate speech with such views as the government believes to be expedient, or holds in all seriousness. It may be worth our while to consider briefly the effect of that compulsion, or persecution, on thoughts as well as actions.<sup>1</sup>

A large section of the people, probably the great majority of the younger generation,<sup>2</sup> accepts the government-sponsored views as true, if not at once at least after a time. How have they been convinced? And where does the time factor enter? They have not been convinced by compulsion, for compulsion does not produce conviction. It merely paves the way for conviction by silencing contradiction. What is called freedom of thought in a large number of cases amounts to—and even for all practical purposes consists of—the ability to choose between two or more different views presented by the small minority of people who are public speakers or writers.<sup>3</sup> If this choice is prevented, the only kind of intellectual independence of which many people are capable is destroyed, and that is the only freedom of thought which is of political importance. Persecution is therefore the indispensable condition for the highest efficiency of what may be called *logica equina*. According to the horse-drawn Parmenides, or to Gulliver's Houyhnhnms, one cannot say, or one cannot reasonably say "the thing which is not": that is, lies are inconceivable. This logic is not peculiar to horses or horse-drawn philosophers, but determines, if in a somewhat modified manner, the thought of many ordinary human beings as well. They would admit, as a matter of course, that man can lie and does lie. But they would add that lies are short-lived and cannot stand the test of repetition—let alone of constant repetition—and that therefore a statement which is constantly repeated and never contradicted must be true. Another line of argument maintains that a statement made by an ordinary fellow may be a lie, but the truth of a statement made by a responsible and respected man, and therefore particularly by a man in a highly responsible or exalted position, is morally certain. These two enthymemes lead to the conclusion that the truth of a statement which is constantly repeated by the head of the government and never contradicted is absolutely certain.

This implies that in the countries concerned all those whose thinking does not follow the rules of *logica equina*, in other words, all those capable of truly independent thinking, cannot be brought to accept the government-sponsored views. Persecution, then, cannot prevent independent thinking. It cannot prevent even the expression of independent thought. For it is as true today as it was more than two thousand years ago that it is a safe venture to tell the truth one knows to benevolent and trustworthy acquaintances, or more precisely, to reasonable friends.<sup>4</sup> Persecution cannot prevent even public expression of the heterodox truth, for a man of independent thought can utter his views in public and remain unharmed, provided he moves with circumspection. He can even utter them in print without incurring any danger, provided he is capable of writing between the lines.

The expression "writing between the lines" indicates the subject of this article. For the influence of persecution on literature is precisely that it compels all writers who hold heterodox

views to develop a peculiar technique of writing, the technique which we have in mind when speaking of writing between the lines. This expression is clearly metaphoric. Any attempt to express its meaning in unmetaphoric language would lead to the discovery of a terra incognita, a field whose very dimensions are as yet unexplored and which offers ample scope for highly intriguing and even important investigations. One may say without fear of being presently convicted of grave exaggeration that almost the only preparatory work to guide the explorer in this field is buried in the writings of the rhetoricians of antiquity.

<sup>1</sup> *Scribere est agere*. See Sir William Blackstone. Commentaries, Book IV. chap. 6. Compare Machiavelli. *Discorsi*, III. 6 (*I Classici del Giglio*, pp. 424-26) and Descartes. *Discours de la méthode*, VI. beginning.

<sup>2</sup> "Socrates: Do you know by what means they might be persuaded to accept this story? Glauco: By no means. as far as they themselves are concerned. but I know how it could be done as regards their sons and their descendants and the people of a later age generally speaking. Socrates: ... I understand, more or less, what you mean." Plato. *Republic*, 415 c6-d5.

<sup>3</sup> "Reason is but choosing" is the central thesis of Milton's *Areopagitica*.

<sup>4</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 450 d3-el.

Preface to the American Edition of the originally published in 1936, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, University of Chicago Press (1952), pp. xv-xvi

I had seen that the modern mind had lost its self-confidence or its certainty of having made decisive progress beyond pre-modern thought; and I saw that it was turning into nihilism, or what is in practice the same thing, fanatical obscurantism. I concluded that the case of the moderns against the ancients must be reopened, without any regard to cherished opinions or convictions, *sine ira et studio*. I concluded in other words that we must learn to consider seriously, i.e. detachedly, the possibility that Swift was right when he compared the modern world to Lilliput and the ancient world to Brobdingnag. I assumed that political philosophy as quest for the final truth regarding the political fundamentals is possible and necessary: I regarded Hobbes as a political philosopher and not as an ideologist or mythologist. I assumed that political philosophy, as an essentially non-historical pursuit; is today in need of a critical study of its history; that such a critical history presupposes that one understand the great thinkers of the past as they understood themselves; that the history of political philosophy requires an adequate division into periods; and that only such a division can be considered adequate as corresponds to the self-consciousness of the actors, i.e. of the great political philosophers. I concluded that Hobbes was the founder of modern political philosophy because he had expressed the conviction that he had effected, in his capacity as a political philosopher, a radical break with all earlier political philosophy much more clearly than Zeno of Citium, Marsilius of Padua, Machiavelli, Bodin, and even Bacon had done. I was confirmed in this view by the judgment of competent men, of Bayle and Rousseau.

*Natural Right and History* (1953) p. 252-3, beginning of Ch. VI, "Crisis of Modern Natural Right"

### A. Rousseau

The first crisis of modernity occurred in the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau was not the first to feel that the modern venture was a radical error and to seek the remedy in a return to classical thought. It suffices to mention the name of Swift. But Rousseau was not a "reactionary." He abandoned himself to modernity. One is tempted to say that only through thus accepting the fate of modern man was he led back to antiquity. At any rate, his return to antiquity was, at the same time, an advance of modernity. While appealing from Hobbes, Locke, or the Encyclopedists to Plato, Aristotle, or Plutarch, he jettisoned important elements of classical thought which his modern predecessors had still preserved. In Hobbes, reason, using her authority, had emancipated passion; passion acquired the status of a freed woman; reason continued to rule, if only by remote control. In Rousseau, passion itself took the initiative and rebelled; usurping the place of reason and indignantly denying her libertine past, passion began to pass judgment, in the severe accents of Catoic virtue, on reason's turpitudes. The fiery rocks with which the Rousseauan eruption had covered the Western world were used, after they had cooled and after they had been hewn, for the imposing structures which the great thinkers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries erected. His disciples clarified his views indeed, but one may wonder whether they preserved the breadth of his vision. His passionate and forceful attack on modernity in the name of what was at the same time classical antiquity and a more advanced modernity was repeated, with no less passion and force, by Nietzsche, who thus ushered in the second crisis of modernity—the crisis of our time.

*Thoughts on Machiavelli* (1958) p. 78 (Chapter 2 on the *Prince*), fn p. 309

Machiavelli mentions only one teacher of princes, namely, Chiron the centaur who brought up Achilles and many other ancient princes. Machiavelli's own model is a mythical figure: he returns to the beginnings not only by making the heroic founders his most exalted theme and the foundation of society his most fundamental theme, but likewise in understanding his own doing. His model is half beast, half man. He urges princes, and especially new princes, first to make use of both natures, the nature of the beast and the nature of man; and in the repetition, simply to imitate the beast, i.e., to use the person of the fox and the lion, or to imitate those two natures.<sup>50</sup> The imitation of the beast takes the place of the imitation of God. We may note here that Machiavelli is our most important witness to the truth that humanism is not enough. Since man must understand himself in the light of the whole or of the origin of the whole which is not human, or since man is the being that must try to transcend humanity, he must transcend humanity in the direction of the subhuman if he does not transcend it in the direction of the superhuman. *Tertium*, i.e., humanism, *non datur*. We may look forward from Machiavelli to Swift whose greatest work culminates in the recommendation that men should imitate the horses,<sup>51</sup> to Rousseau who demanded the return to the state of nature, a subhuman state, and to Nietzsche who suggested that Truth is not God but a Woman. As for Machiavelli, one may say with at least equal right that he replaces the imitation of the God-Man Christ by the imitation of the Beast-Man Chiron. That Beast-Man is, as Machiavelli indicates, a creation of the writers of antiquity, a creature of the imagination. Just as Scipio, in imitating Cyrus, in fact imitated a creation of Xenophon,<sup>52</sup> so the princes in imitating Chiron, will in fact imitate, not Chiron, but the ancient writers, if the carrying out of a teaching can justly be called an imitation of that teaching. But whatever may be true of princes or other actors, certainly Machiavelli, by

teaching princes what Chiron was said to have taught, imitates Chiron or follows the creators of Chiron. Yet, as we have noted before, merely by teaching openly and in his own name what certain ancient writers had taught covertly and by using their characters as their mouthpieces, Machiavelli sets forth an entirely new teaching. He is a Chiron of an entirely new kind.

50. *Prince* chs. 18 (55) and 19 (62).

51. Swift's Houyhnhnms, being reasonable horses, are centaurs if a centaur is a being which combines the

perfection of a horse with the perfection of man. In order to understand what the recommendation to

imitate these beast-men means in *Gulliver's Travels*, one would have to start from the facts that the relation between Lilliput and Brobdingnag imitates the relation between the moderns and the ancients, and that the same relation is imitated again on a different plane in the last two parts of the work.

52. Compare *Prince* ch. 14 end with *Discourses* II 13.

*What is Political Philosophy* (title chapter, pp. 23-25) (1959); in this excerpt, there are minor differences of punctuation and word order with the 1957 essay.

(3)\* The belief that scientific knowledge, i.e., the kind of knowledge possessed or aspired to by modern science, is the highest form of human knowledge, implies a depreciation of pre-scientific knowledge. If one takes into consideration the contrast between scientific knowledge of the world and pre-scientific knowledge of the world, one realizes that positivism preserves in a scarcely disguised manner Descartes' universal doubt of pre-scientific knowledge and his radical break with it. It certainly distrusts pre-scientific knowledge, which it likes to compare to folklore. This superstition fosters all sorts of sterile investigations or complicated idiocies. Things which every ten-year-old child of normal intelligence knows are regarded as being in need of scientific proof in order to become acceptable as facts. And this scientific proof, which is not only not necessary, is not even possible. To illustrate this by the simplest example: all studies in social science presuppose that its devotees can tell human beings from other beings; this most fundamental knowledge was not acquired by them in classrooms; and this knowledge is not transformed by social science into scientific knowledge, but retains its initial status without any modification throughout. If this pre-scientific knowledge is not knowledge, scientific studies, which stand or fall with it, lack the character of knowledge. The preoccupation with scientific proof of things which everyone knows well enough, and better, without scientific proof, leads to the neglect of that thinking, or that reflection, which must precede all scientific studies if these studies are to be relevant. The scientific study of politics is often presented as ascending from the ascertainment of political "facts," i.e., of what has happened hitherto in politics, to the formulation of "laws" whose knowledge would permit the prediction of future political events. This goal is taken as a matter of course without a previous investigation as to whether the subject matter with which political science deals admits of adequate understanding in terms of "laws" or whether the universals through which political things can be understood as what they are must not be conceived of in entirely different terms. Scientific concern with political facts, relations of political facts, recurrent relations of political facts, or laws of political behavior, requires isolation of the phenomena which it is studying. But if this isolation is not to lead to irrelevant or

misleading results, one must see the phenomena in question within the whole to which they belong, and one must clarify that whole, i.e., the whole political or politico-social order. One cannot arrive, e.g., at a kind of knowledge of "group politics" which deserves to be called scientific if one does not reflect on what genus of political orders is presupposed if there is to be "group politics" at all, and what kind of political order is presupposed by the specific "group politics" which one is studying. But one cannot clarify the character of a specific democracy, e.g., or of democracy in general, without having a clear understanding of the alternatives to democracy. Scientific political scientists are inclined to leave it at the distinction between democracy and authoritarianism, i.e., they absolutize the given political order by remaining within a horizon which is defined by the given political order and its opposite. The scientific approach tends to lead to the neglect of the primary or fundamental questions and therewith to thoughtless acceptance of received opinion. As regards these fundamental questions our friends of scientific exactness are strangely unexacting. To refer again to the most simple and at the same time decisive example, political science requires clarification of what distinguishes political things from things which are not political; it requires that the question be raised and answered "what is political?" This question cannot be dealt with scientifically but only dialectically. And dialectical treatment necessarily begins from pre-scientific knowledge and takes it most seriously. Pre-scientific knowledge, or "common sense" knowledge, is thought to be discredited by Copernicus and the succeeding natural science. But the fact that what we may call telescopic-microscopic knowledge is very fruitful in certain areas does not entitle one to deny that there are things which can only be seen as what they are if they are seen with the unarmed eye; or, more precisely, if they are seen in the perspective of the citizen, as distinguished from the perspective of the scientific observer. If one denies this, one will repeat the experience of Gulliver with the nurse in Brobdingnag and become entangled in the kind of research projects by which he was amazed in Laputa.

\* Ed. Note: This is 3<sup>rd</sup> in a list of 4 enumerated points, which have as their prelude, "It is not necessary to enter here and now into a discussion of the theoretical weakness of the social science positivism. It suffices to allude to the considerations which speak decisively against this school." (pp. 20-21)

#### From Article:

Epigraph to "On Classical Political Philosophy" (1945); not in the corresponding chapter in *What Is Political Philosophy*; but in the corresponding chapter in *Man and Modern Society*, Ed. Karl de Schweinitz, Jr., and Kenneth W. Thompson, Henry Holt and Company, Inc. (1953)

The ancients "would therefore advise the moderns rather to raise their own side of the hill than dream of pulling down that of the ancients; to the former of which they would not only give license, but also largely contribute."- *The Battle of the Books*

#### From Lectures:

The first two are from *Toward Natural Right and History Lectures and Essays by Leo Strauss 1937-1946*, Edited by J.A. Colen and Svetozar Minkov, The University of Chicago Press, 2018. Page number below are from this book.

The Origin of Modern Political Thought (1937), p. 168

The text can be found in Leo Strauss Papers, box 14, folder 11. This transcription was produced by Svetozar Minkov, revised by J. A. Colen and Scott Nelson, and annotated by Svetozar Minkov; it benefited from a comparison with the transcription included in Emmanuel Patard, *Leo Strauss at the New School for Social Research*.

It can be shown that this development from Cicero to Condorcet is not so continuous as it seems to be; that there is a definite break of this continuity just between Hooker and Locke. The fact that this break is overlooked is due to<sup>78</sup> a specific fallacy created by the writings<sup>79</sup> of the later seventeenth and the eighteenth century in general, and of this period in England in particular.<sup>a</sup> The thought of this period was already a reaction in the direction<sup>80</sup> of the classical, and even of the theological, tradition against the much more radical first half of the seventeenth century. I need only recall the names of the most original<sup>81</sup> exponents of this movement: Leibniz and Swift:<sup>82</sup> Leibniz who tried to reintroduce the teleological conception of Aristotle into the framework of the mechanistic and determinist modern science as founded by Descartes and Hobbes, and Swift, the author of the battle of the books.<sup>b</sup>

78. "I shall speak of it later. Now I shall stress only one point. There is" was replaced by "The fact that this break is overlooked is due to."

79. "the writings of" was added.

80. "sense" was replaced by "direction."

81. "genial" was replaced by "original."

82. The portion of the sentence after the colon was added by hand in the margin.

<sup>a</sup> [LS note] Burke says in his Letter to a Member etc. (loc. cit., p. 267): "We continue, as in the last two ages, to read, more generally than I believe is now done on the Continent, the authors of sound antiquity."

<sup>b</sup> [LS note] *The Battle of the Books* (1704).

Historicism, pp. 83-84

(Lecture to be delivered in the fall of 1941 in the General Seminar)

5.<sup>121</sup> *In our time*, the elaboration of the elementary philosophic questions requires serious and intensive historical studies. Until a generation ago, the superiority of the modern approach, i.e., of the habits of thought which have emerged since the Renaissance, to the earlier approaches was generally taken for granted. Those philosophers who were in opposition to the predominant trend of modern thought—such men as Bergson and W. James—demanded an essentially *new* kind of philosophizing, a kind of philosophy which should be still more different from premodern thought than from the thought of the seventeenth till nineteenth centuries. In the meantime, the essential superiority of modern philosophy to premodern philosophy has become doubtful to an ever-increasing number of people. The success of neo-Thomism is a byword. But neo-Thomism is merely the most popular form of a much broader trend whose most powerful and most profound representative was, and still is, the unknown Nietzsche. The question as to whether the moderns are superior to the ancients, or the ancients are superior to the moderns, has again become a *question*, and even the most fundamental question: for it concerns the *approach* to *all* philosophic questions, it concerns the *method* of all philosophic investigations. That

question has been the topic of a famous discussion at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century, of *la querelle des anciens et des modernes*. Most of you will remember Swift's *Battle of the Books*, in which the moderns are compared to the spider which "boasts of being obliged to no other creature, but of drawing and spinning out all from itself," and the ancients to the bee "which, by a universal range, with long search, much study, true judgment, and *distinction of things*, brings home honey and wax," "thus furnishing mankind with the two noblest of things, which are sweetness and light."<sup>a</sup> [That controversy, it was believed, has been decided by "*history*" in favor of the moderns. But the verdict of "*history*," i.e., of the public opinion of two centuries, is not decisive. Those who did not know it before can learn it today that the victorious cause is not necessarily the good cause.]<sup>122</sup> The question of the ancients and the moderns remains then an open question to which only a fool will offer a ready-made answer. To answer that question, and indeed to understand what it means, we need historical studies: *exact* confrontations of the ancient and the moderns. I say, *exact* confrontations, i.e., such confrontations as present the ancients from *their* point of view, and not from the modern point of view. For if we were to<sup>123</sup> present the thought of the<sup>124</sup> ancients from the point of view of the moderns, we should beg the decisive question: we should tacitly presuppose the superiority of the modern approach. But these historical studies are not an end in themselves, they are merely preparatory to a future attempt to settle the *philosophic* question.

[Someone might object that we do not need new historical studies since we *know* the ancients: are their doctrines not clearly and adequately set forth<sup>125</sup> in the books of the great scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and especially of<sup>126</sup> the classical scholars of our time? The answer must be in the negative. For it is impossible that a classical scholar, as far as he is a classical scholar, should understand ancient thought. The classical scholar is not an ancient thinker, he is a modern man: his modern prejudices are bound to interfere with his understanding of the ancients, if he does not methodically reflect on the modern presuppositions as such. Such a reflection transcends the limits of classical scholarship, and must be entrusted to philosophic historians.]<sup>127</sup>

<sup>a</sup> See Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub with Other Early Works 1696–1707* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 150–51. The emphasis is Strauss's.

121. "5." was inserted by hand.

122. The passage reading "That controversy . . . the good cause" was bracketed by hand.

123. "were to" was inserted by typewriter to replace "should," which was crossed out.

124. "thought of the" was inserted by typewriter.

125. "Set forth in the books of" was inserted by hand to replace "expounded by."

126. "Of" was inserted by hand to replace "by,"

127. The entire paragraph was bracketed by hand.

"How to Study Medieval Philosophy" Lecture to be delivered on May 16, 1944 at the Fourth Institute of Biblical and Post-Biblical Studies. Published in *Interpretation*, Spring 1996 Vol. 23, no. 3, p. 322.

In the normal<sup>10</sup> and most interesting case, the philosopher studied by the historian of philosophy is a man by far superior to his historian in intelligence, imagination,<sup>11</sup> subtlety. This historian does well to remind himself of the experience which Gulliver made when he came in

contact, through necromancy, with the illustrious dead: "I had a Whisper from a Ghost, who shall be nameless, that the Commentators of Aristotle and other great philosophers always kept in the most distant quarters from their Principals, through a Consciousness of Shame and Guilt, because they had so horribly misrepresented the meaning of those authors to Posterity." The most *sustained* effort of the most *gifted* historian, hardly suffices to carry him for a short moment to the height which is the native and perpetual haunt<sup>12</sup> of the philosopher: how can the historian even *dream* of reaching a point from which he can look *down* on a philosopher?<sup>13</sup>

10. "typical" has been added, or perhaps substituted, above the line.

11. The words "judgment, taste, and" after "imagination" have been crossed out.

12. "haunt" replaces "abode" which replaced "domicile"; both "abode" and "domicile" have been crossed out.

13. This entire paragraph was added (on a separate sheet) in pencil for insertion after the end of the preceding paragraph, either as a part of that paragraph or, as we have it,

"Progress or Return? The Contemporary Crisis in Western Civilization". Two lectures delivered Nov 5 and 12, 1952 at B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation at the University of Chicago, reprinted in *An Introduction to Political Philosophy Ten Essays by Leo Strauss*, Edited by Hilail Gildin, Wayne State University Press (1989) p. 269. It was originally published in *Modern Judaism I* (1981): 17-45.

I have spoken of modernity as of something definite and hence, knowable. An analysis of this phenomenon is out of the question here, as goes without saying. Instead I would like briefly to enumerate those characteristic elements of modernity which are particularly striking, at least to me. But I must make one observation in order to protect myself against gross misunderstanding. Modern phenomenon is not characterized by the fact that it is located, say, between 1600 and 1952, because premodern traditions of course survived and survive. And more than that, throughout the modern period, there has been a constant movement against this modern trend. From the very beginning—one phenomenon which is very well known, perhaps unduly well-known—is the quarrel between the ancients and moderns at the end of the seventeenth century, which in its most well-known form was concerned with the relatively unimportant question of whether the French drama of the seventeenth century was really comparable to the classical drama. The real quarrel between the ancients and moderns did not concern the drama, of course, but concerned modern science and philosophy. But there was a resistance to that from the very beginning: the greatest man in English letters who represented this is Swift; but then you have it again very strongly in German classicism in the second half of the eighteenth century; and then indeed in the nineteenth century this movement, this counter-movement, was completely pushed to the wall as a great intellectual movement. But in a way, of course, the tradition still persisted. So having made clear that by modernity I do not mean something which is simply chronological, let me now indicate what I think are the most striking elements of modernity in a purely enumerative fashion without attempting an analysis.

From Courses:

Course at the New School:



from *Toward Natural Right and History Lectures and Essays* by Leo Strauss 1937-1946, Edited by J.A. Colen and Svetozar Minkov, The University of Chicago Press, 2018. p. 288 (no other information available)

76. Seminar (the official course number is unavailable): The Influence of Politics on Literature. Saturdays, 10 a.m.– 12 p.m. What is the meaning of poetic or fictional presentation of political problems? How do the constant and changing features of political life affect various forms of literature? These questions are discussed on the basis of Voltaire's *Candide*, Swift's *Tale of a Tub*, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, and, more fully, a work of antiquity. (Spring 1941)

From Plato's *Laws* (Winter quarter 1952; student notes)

Problem: In Book 2 poet is subject to censorship by the legislator; in Book 4 the poet presented as teacher of legislators. There is essential twofoldness of the poet as contrasted with the simplicity of the legislator. But this is not sufficient: there is a twofoldness of legislation itself (legislation for slave and free). Legislation has twofoldness because of perceivers of legislation. The twofoldness of poetry is also because of perceivers of poetry. Xenophon: Socrates likes to quote Homer. Socrates used two methods [see *City and Man* 53 about Socrates referring to Odysseus as a "safe speaker" and Socrates' two methods of dialectic—ed.]. The poet is subject to the legislator insofar as he addresses the simple mind; he is not subject to legislation insofar as he does not address the simple mind. Poetry and art are imitative: literally. Therefore, the poet makes no distinction between noble and base insofar as he imitates the base. Poetry blurs the difference between the base and the noble. Poet imitates man as seen by the legislator, in light of a conventional standard of goodness and therefore is an imitator of imitator. But this is only partly true, because (Book 4) the poet imitates man as he is. The true poet combines both: imitates man as seen by the legislator and imitates man as he is, thus a twofoldness. Homer presents gods as presented by law (in broad sense, custom, etc.), but we see that Homer, like the gods, is watching men but doesn't take sides. The poet, therefore, is neither a god nor an ordinary human being. In a sense he is higher than the gods as established by legislator. Yet he accepts them. This twofoldness is the one Plato regards as essential. The greatest document of this kind in English writing is *Gulliver's Travels*.

From a course on Plato's *Statesman* (Spring quarter 1954); from student notes (have not located, yet, in LS' own notes)

Essential cause is what determines right mean. Contributing cause helps to produce right mean. Knife necessary to cut our excrescence which medical art determines is necessary. Table must be right size, shoes must fit. Admission of excess and defect as necessary as admission of non-being. Sophist only possible if he appears, seems to be, what he is not. The simply nothing is of course simply impossible. Sophist says what is not, in Swift's words in *Gulliver's Travels*, there is a kind of nothing which is necessary. In relative sense nothing is needed if there is to be any being – "otherness." Being of non-being refers to something which is not "this," but is something else. There is a coming into being of excess and defect. Are the two beings, non-being and

excess similar, same? Being of non-being means possibility of heterogeneity. Being has an articulation in which is heterogeneity.

From a course on Aristotle's *Politics* (Spring quarter 1960)

Session 1 (March 29, 1960)

Now from this point of view [that there was a fundamentally new teaching starting with Machiavelli and Hobbes—ed.] the primary task for our orientation in this field would be to understand the meaning of this fundamental change from classical thought to modern thought. At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century this issue became a very popular issue and it was called at that time the quarrel of the ancients and the moderns. Those of you who have only read Swift and nothing else, Swift's *Battle of the Books* or perhaps *Gulliver*, but then *Gulliver* is a bit more complicated, would know that this was the issue at the time. Who are better, the ancients or the moderns? And Swift, of course, being a paradoxical fellow in every respect, says the ancients. But we must not forget this literary controversy because if we are chiefly concerned with [whether] the modern *literature* was as good as or better than the ancients, that was a kind of rearguard fight of no great interest. The *big* battle was of course that between the modern *physics*, Newton, which was won a generation before, but before this great victory of modern physical science through Newton there was already a fight regarding human thought *as a whole* and in particular, political thought, and the greatest coryphees in that fight, on the modern side, were Machiavelli and Hobbes.

From a course on Xenophon (Winter quarter 1963)

Session 12 (no date, *Cyropaedia* IV)

Same student: He was faster on a horse.

LS: Oh, I see. That's good. In other words, he wants—that is also something I believe. Yes?

Student:

Are not centaurs demigods?

LS: Sure. In other words, he wants to become super-human. He wants to be more than a man and yet to have all the advantages of men, and have more. Well, I would say this is the limit of Chrysantas' notion of a man surpassing man. This enlarges the question, ya? In other words, a beast-man is more than a man. Yes?

Student: Should we contrast this to Cyrus' desire actually to be a god?

LS: Yes, sure, one must do that. This is his notion. But Chrysantas' notion of his aspiration is the synthetic centaur. I mean, he uses the expression "synthetic" because every evening he can take away that belt and he is again a human being.

Student: Is this an additional indication of his prudence? He knows it is limited, therefore he doesn't have the aspiration to become a god, but a demi-god.

LS: Yes, but still, you see, that is a very complicated thing. I do not claim that I can interpret it, but I think as a model for interpretation I would take the fact which we observed when reading the *Oeconomicus*, where, when Ischomachus taught Socrates the art of planting, and Socrates knew everything—and then the reflection: “knowledge is recollection.” Because Socrates remembered having passed certain fields, how the people had done the planting: knowledge is recollection. Now this is of course a reminder of the doctrine that knowledge is recollection on a philosophic level, the Platonic level. Now Xenophon is capable of doing that, and this is his particular manner, to present the higher issues on a low level just as comedy does this. I mean, when you read Aristophanes' *Clouds*, for example, the presentation of the issues of astronomy, and geography, or whatever it is, is on the level of an Athenian peasant. Socrates is making investigations beneath the earth—well, that means of course he wants to find the right place for planting onions. I forgot the other jokes. Now Xenophon does something similar, only from a pro-Socratic point of view, not an anti-Socratic point of view. So I would say something of this kind may be behind it.

Now let us look: What is such a centaur as Chrysantas describes it? It is a being composed of a rational being, man, and an irrational being. Now man is of course himself composed of reason and sub-reason, sub-rational things, desires and [other] things. Now in man the *logos*, reason, is supposed to rule the irrational. That is one thing. But another thing which we must also not forget, that reason in man is helped by the irrational, just as in the hippocentaur, in the centaur, the human is helped by the better ear of the horse, you remember? Man, in other words, is in a way a centaur. Man is in a way a centaur, a centaur being a being mixed of rational and irrational. I believe this leads even up to Swift's *Gulliver*, the fourth part, the Houyhnhnms. In Plato's *Phaedrus* man is described as a man, two horses, and a chariot.<sup>185</sup> The two horses are the desires, man is reason, and the chariot is the body. I mean, in other words, Chrysantas in his barbaric way divines something, but since he divines it in a barbaric way, he also ruins the thing.

Student: Why does he make centaur so emphatic? Why does he say horse-centaur?

LS: Because in Greek, centaur would be perfectly sufficient? That I do not know. In the *Cynegeticus* he speaks of hippocentaurus?

Student: No, centaurus.

LS: No, of centaurus. Very good question.

Student: Does it have something to do with the army?

LS: Yes, he obviously wants to underline the fact that a part of the centaur is a horse, ya, otherwise the mere name centaur would not supply the connection with cavalry, the verbal connection. That I would suggest, which is probably not good enough, but it is worth considering. I do not claim that I can interpret it fully, I said only what occurred to me. So we turn now to the next chapter. Yes?

<sup>185</sup> Phaedrus 246a.

Session 14 (no date *Cyropaedia* VI)

Student: “Cyrus indulged in such boastful speech only on the eve of battle; at other times he was never boastful at all—” (VII 1.17)

LS: Or “not very much.” By the way, does Socrates boast? The same word, “talking big.”

Student: In the *Apology*.

LS: In the *Apology of Socrates* by Xenophon, Socrates is said to have “talked big” in his defense at his trial.

Student: Does it have the same meaning?

LS: Sure. Sure, it has the same meaning, but since—when the translators and interpreters come, these famous people who are presented by Swift, you know, in *Gulliver*, in Book Three, when they come down into the nether world and then they see two august figures, and then a multitude of shades running away; and Gulliver asks who they are and he is told: These are Homer and Aristotle, and these are the commentators.<sup>217</sup> That Cyrus could talk big is bearable, but that Socrates could have been said to have talked big is impossible, and therefore—I don’t have a translation here, I am sure they would translate it differently. They would use a euphemism to satisfy their very delicate taste.

<sup>217</sup> *Gulliver’s Travels* Part 3, Ch. 8

From Aristotle’s *Ethics* (Spring quarter 1963)

Session 2: April 4, 1963

Q: (As to what the theoretical situation would be if a being possessing speech were discovered on Mars, for example.)

LS: How do you know that? Let us assume they are quadrupeds, quadrupeds who speak. Yes, but that’s the question: prior to empirical evidence one might very well doubt whether there can be thinking quadrupeds; I mean, wherever imaginative men like Swift and so have imagined about that. Aristotle’s view is this: man is the only being which has a hand, as distinguished from paws or so, so the hand is, in a way, the specifically human organ.

Session 9: May 9, 1963

LS: That was Hobbes’ misanthropic remark: that laughing comes always from a feeling of superiority to others. You know, and he gives such a simple example: laughing when someone

else falls. We laugh, but that is not the whole story. Protagoras, if I remember well, said laughing or smiling is a becoming resplendence of the soul. Have you ever heard of an angelic smile?

Q: Yes, a smile, but that's not laughter but what about when people laugh at a ridiculous machine? People do this. An absurd object. It's very hard to see the element of cruelty there.

LS: I believe that this kind of psychology really doesn't work because it takes an accident for the essence of the things. The old definition of the laughable in Aristotle is the harmlessly evil. I mean, we don't laugh about an act or murder, a harmful evil, but we laugh about a harmless evil on all kinds of levels. Very uneducated young children laugh about everybody they affect, as we know. Well, when we become older we don't do that. That depends on the degree of our sophistication. We laugh heartily about extremely stupid utterances, whether by students or professors. Yes, but do we do it in order to feel ourselves superior or do we do it because it is a harmless evil? That's a question. That Hobbes had this nasty grimness and sees only this side of it: that is his business. And I suppose there may be on many occasions an element of malice, but it is not necessary. You see how many occasions on which we laugh where no individual human beings are involved, where we tell stories about some man, "x". What does the feelings of superiority mean? We laugh about ourselves from time to time. And so I don't believe that this is true. I mean, you can say laughing: that is ultimately the few relaxations of the deep fears which grip us all the time. There were people who have said this. I don't believe that's necessary: and why not leave it at that phenomenal thing, something like Aristotle said: harmless evils. For example, if people would build up an institute of research with big foundations money in order to breed sheep without wool we all would laugh. We all would laugh because it is really, in a way, a harmless evil. You see, I mean, nothing bad could come out of it: the sheep can also be eaten, although one would say you can have the same thing by shearing sheep. You see, you can do that. The joke is unfortunately not from me but from Jonathan Swift in the third book of *Gulliver's Travels*, a must for everyone who wants to understand present day life. Good. (Laughter.). No, honestly. Swift has seen what was coming but he didn't see yet the social science research. He saw only what kind of thing natural science if left to itself might try to do. Yes?

From Vico (Fall quarter 1963)

Session 5: October 14, 1963

LS:

Well, [we have not yet come to] what he thinks about it. It's rather like this. First there [are] mere sounds, yes? If you will look at animals and know them a bit you know that they make different sounds on different occasions, when they're gay, and when they are afraid, and so on. And then, in addition, men can do more. Men can also point. They can point. And you can do the same thing: you can go to a shop, for example, and [not] say a word. Simply show this, and he knows you want matches. Yes? And you wouldn't need a word for matches. Swift discusses some of these people in the third part of *Gulliver*, but for other reasons, because they are too abstracted from mundane things, these colors in the . . . and they do this kind of thing. But at any

rate, clearly hieroglyphic writing has nothing to do with inarticulate language, but Vico asserts in addition that there was a period of hieroglyphic speaking.

From Grotius *On the Laws of War and Peace* (Fall quarter 1964)

Session 4: October 15, 1964

There is, first of all, something which at least in retrospect looks like groping for something radically new, and we may take Grotius as a good specimen. Then in the generation after him, there takes place the break with full clarity, speaking of break with the earlier tradition, and this is of course represented by Descartes and Hobbes above all, and the victory of this revolution which culminated and which became obvious to the meanest capacity with Newton.

But even at that time there were people whom we can call reactionaries, people who did not want to have anything to do with this. Perhaps the most famous of them is Jonathan Swift, whose *Battle of the Books* is not his best work but still a clear sign of it, and especially *Gulliver's Travels*. I remind you only in the third book the description of the research projects in [Laputa]: how to produce sheep without wool. It's useful, only it doesn't make any difference; and other things which have a very great meaning in spite of or because of the amusing presentation. To some extent, also incidentally, [in] Shaftesbury at the end of the seventeenth century, a pupil of Locke (Locke was his tutor for some time), but clearly opposed to Locke and also to Hobbes, there was an attempt to [reinstate] the older principles with some modification.

From Introduction to Political Philosophy (Winter quarter 1965)

Session 4 (January 18, 1965)

Same student: Yet isn't common sense based on empirically verifiable propositions? That is, a commonsense proposition is one that can be verified empirically.

LS: Yah, but what does this mean? For example, if you have the statement: This is a human being, to whom I can address my questionnaire, and this is not a human being. What does it mean, that this is empirically verifiable? The one will not say hello when I say hello? [Laughter] This is an empirical proof that the one is a human being, the other is not?

Same student: What I'm saying is that, yes, it does raise questions of epistemology, and because science says that we accept only statements which can be verified empirically, it's resting on the same—

LS: Yah, to that extent. But you see that the divergence of common sense and science comes out in such simple things. Common sense tells us that the sun is rising in the east and setting in the west, that the earth is standing and the sun is moving. Then Copernicus came, and there came infinitely greater complications later, especially in our century. Common sense has been proven wrong. What does common sense say about heaven which can stand up after the invention of the

telescope? What about the enormous worlds opened up by the microscope, which are wholly inaccessible to common sense as common sense? It would be more helpful to say: Common sense is unarmed reason—I mean not armed with telescope and microscope—and science is armed reason. Now if you state it in this way, the question arises: Are there not spheres where unarmed reason is at least as good as armed? (You know what I mean by “armed”; that is not the best word, but you understand me.) For example, in our relations with human beings, in our understanding of them, in our handling of them, we are not helped in any way by telescope and microscope. If you don’t believe me, read *Gulliver’s Travels*, where, when he was in Brobdingnag, he looked in a way through a microscope and saw the people of enormous size and other things of this kind. This, I believe, is in a more practical way the issue. And this also shows the limitations of this analogy: since the natural sciences have led us to a much deeper understanding of extrahuman nature than we possessed formerly, the application of the same approach and of the same methods to human things must bring about a similar progress, a radical progress and improvement of our knowledge of human things and of human affairs.

Session 7 (January 27, 1965)

...quoting Collingwood’s *Autobiography*, “The sameness is the sameness of an historical process, and the difference is the difference between one which in the course of that process has turned into something else, and the other thing into which it has turned. Plato’s polis and Hobbes’s absolutist State are related by a traceable historical process, whereby one has turned into the other; anyone who ignores that process, denies the difference between them, and argues that where Plato’s political theory contradicts Hobbes’s one of them must be wrong, is saying the thing that is not” (LS: “the Swiftian formula for a lie, for an untruth”)

Session 8 (February 1, 1965)

At a certain moment a break occurred. Again, we do not trust our own impression but look around and listen to these voices of the men of the past, who claimed to have done away completely with this political philosophy founded by Socrates, root and branch. And the loudest and clearest voice—there cannot be the slightest doubt about that—is that of Thomas Hobbes, and so until further notice we will assume that the break with classical political philosophy occurred in the work of Hobbes. And as I will already say now, closer study would show that the break had occurred prior to Hobbes, in the work of Machiavelli, but in Machiavelli the claim to a radical break is by far not as audible and powerful as in Hobbes. So we have then this very simple division from which we start: classical political philosophy or premodern political philosophy, and modern political philosophy. And the question which concerns us, since we are not merely historians, we cannot afford to be merely historians, this question is for us a quarrel: Which of the two is right? And this is a quarrel of the ancients and the moderns: *la querelle des anciens et des modernes*, as it was called in the seventeenth century. At that time the famous quarrel was the quarrel about whether, say, Dryden or Corneille were as good dramatists as Sophocles and Euripides, or Molière as good a comedian as Aristophanes. In other words, it appears to be primarily a literary question, but it is much more than that. The fundamental quarrel was that between modern philosophy, which includes modern natural science, and classical philosophy and classical science. The most famous document in the English language of

that quarrel is Swift's *Battle of the Books*, and for those who read more carefully, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. But this I cannot go into now.

Session 9 (February 3, 1965)

But we would have— Mr. Glenn, all my statements are in need of long footnotes. I mean, I am familiar with the fact that the Aristotelian tradition, in a way the same as the Thomistic tradition, lasted very long into modern times. I am not speaking now of Catholic universities, but even in the Protestant universities of Germany the prevalent view in the eighteenth century prior to Kant was a modified Thomistic view. I am not speaking now of the theological teaching proper but the philosophic teaching. The orientation by the natural perfection of man was still there. But these men— the most famous name was Christian Wolff— are practically forgotten. The men who molded modernity were those who opposed the classical tradition, and only in very rare cases are these reactionaries remembered. I think the most famous case is that of Swift, at least in the English-speaking countries.

Session 13 (no date)

He [Aristotle] distinguishes five different kinds of kingship, but only two require discussion since the other three are only in between. And he discusses only the two extreme cases. The one is the absolute king, of whom we have heard before; the other is a king like the Spartan king, practically only a lifelong and hereditary general. And Aristotle says this question is of no fundamental interest, because the institution of lifelong generalship you can have under any regime. and for one reason or another, a democracy, oligarchy, or kingship can have lifelong generals. Again, a beautiful illustration of the principle that whatever is politically neutral, whatever can occur in every regime, is as such politically uninteresting. A simple example from another scheme: if you live in a country which depends for mere survival on an irrigation system, and this is generally known and admitted, the irrigation system is not a political issue. It is very important, the whole country would be ruined if the irrigation system broke down, but it is unpolitical: a simple example of the fact that something can be very important and politically absolutely unimportant. And there is of course the opposite, which can never be: that something is politically important and otherwise unimportant. Or can you think of an example?

Student: In *Gulliver's Travels* [inaudible] it is obviously very important to the whole question of regimes, but not in itself.

LS: Yes, but from which point of view? Only if you transcend the political sphere. In other words, for a philosopher it would be very unimportant, but for Lilliputians it would be very important. Yes, to that extent you are right. But since we are ordinary human beings, I believe we can say that whatever is politically important can never be simply unimportant. One would have to raise very high in order to be able to say what you just said.

From Montesquieu course (Spring quarter 1966)

Session 2: March 30, 1966



LS: Not necessarily this, but the development of the arts, of the fine arts of course here, can be achieved on a rather simple technological basis. It doesn't require all the complications which we have now. We must not forget that even Marx in one of his early writings, or is it a letter, I do not know, takes it for granted that Greek poetry is the highest, and it is for him a question how is this possible since in all other respects modernity has surpassed the Greeks. And he brings it together with something, he uses a metaphor to explain that: Greece is, as it were, the childhood of the human race. And there is something which belongs to the virtues, as it were, of childhood. And, on the other hand, modernity is the maturity of man, something of this kind. I'm quoting from memory.

Student: Montesquieu said that?

LS: No, no; this came much later. The only one who saw, at least the only one known to me, who was from the very beginning absolutely doubtful of this modern experiment was Jonathan Swift, in his *Gulliver's Travels*, Book III, when he describes this house—I forget the name, was it Laputa—at any rate it was the Royal Society in London, and the kind of theoretical and practical problems they tried to solve. For example, this beautiful conceit, they had to breed sheep without wool. That existed nowhere, and it would be quite a feat to get them. And also, some slightly indecent, which I do not mention, which also reminds me of some research projects of which I have read in more recent times. But Swift's point is quite unusual. I do not know to what extent John Donne could be mentioned in this connection, I couldn't say. He surely also was very skeptical about what was going on. But I do not know him sufficiently to say anything about that.

From *Meno* (Spring quarter 1966)

Session 14: no date

Student: You don't have to answer this if you think it will go too far, but<sup>37</sup> wouldn't the impossibility of deciding between the classical philosophers and the modern philosophers almost be the same as giving in to the modern philosophers?

LS: I don't understand you.

Same Student: In other words, to use a poetic analogy, if we couldn't prove that we weren't on a darkling plane where confused armies clash by night, aren't we indeed on such a plane?

LS: And what would this prove?

Same Student: That the modern view could be correct. That—

LS: <sup>38</sup>Well, you would have to replace your beautiful metaphor by a non-metaphorical statement, and if you mean the crisis of modern men, it would still be a question whether it is the crisis of modern man and not of man as such. Could this not also be, that once you accept certain principles which were accepted in the early seventeenth century and had a tremendous success,

whether that was perhaps a wrong choice? And we are the late heirs of that. It cannot be settled as simpl[y] as that.<sup>39</sup> Some people of course<sup>40</sup> believe that the mere fact that we have now computers, to say nothing of telescopes and microscopes, settles all questions regarding the ancients and moderns, but these people are not very thoughtful, you know?<sup>41</sup> Because these are not simply good things, as we have learned from the Meno; they have to be governed by prudence to be good, and therefore—and whether we are as prudent or more prudent than premodern men, that is a very long question. A simple introduction you will find in the third part of Gulliver’s Travels about prudence in modern science, which is of course a satire, naturally; but satires are not necessarily wholly misleading. Good.

37 Deleted “is the...would the impossibility....”

38 Deleted “But it would....”

39 Deleted “I mean, in other words.”

40 Deleted “they.”

41 Deleted “I mean that is...that...Because this good....”

From Nietzsche (St. Johns 1971-72)

Session 14: May 20, 1972

LS: Because man could not reach his highest stature without dying.

Same Student: . . . .

LS: For most men, yes, if these cripples and fragments, as he calls them.

Same Student: . . . .

LS: No, no, I mean immortality is out. It’s absolutely out. I believe as a reason he would give you perhaps what Swift gives as a reason in the third part of *Gulliver’s Travels*. You know the immortals there. Figure it out, how it would be if we were immortal in the body. And the soul: [it] is out of the question for another reason that the disembodied soul would survive.

From Letters:

38 Perne Road, Cambridge, England

25 December 1935.

[draft of an unsent letter]

Dear Mr. Krüger,

It’s again been six months since we last exchanged letters. I probably don’t have to excuse my long silence. You will understand that I am very busy, and that I have to use the times during which my head is clear for sharp thinking to get myself out of the mess I have put myself in.

I must confirm that I received your review of Hartmann and thank you for it. It is obvious that you are completely in the right over against Hartmann: any speculative stance toward history should have become impossible since the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Untimely Meditation*.<sup>76</sup> On the other hand you will not be surprised to hear that I cannot completely agree with you. I am less convinced than ever that historicity as such is a philosophical problem. I have meanwhile familiarized myself a little with the beginnings of the philosophy of history in the 16th century, where the problem still appears in its ancient nakedness, and that has only strengthened my suspicions that first arose regarding Mannheim's idiocy (*Ideology and Utopia*). On the other hand, I concede far more than before that you are right regarding Kant: he really is the only Platonist among the modern philosophers. (By the way, Swift is a very odd and, for you, I believe, very important man—he opposed the entire modern development with incredible awareness.)

Now I want to tell you a bit about my work, in the hope and with the request that you might soon clarify for me your enigmatic allusions concerning time and creation. I have placed Hobbes on the back burner for now, in order to first gain clarity about the history of Platonism in the Islamic and Jewish middle ages. Farabi is astounding, ὁ ἀρχηγὸς τῆς τριαύτης φιλοσοφίας.<sup>77</sup> Perhaps, in my initial joy of discovery, I overestimated him a bit. But there is enough that remains astounding about him. Especially the perspective he opens on ancient—middle and new—Platonism. I am looking through late Neoplatonic commentaries and am surprised at the subtlety of the exegesis. It is an ocean I will have to delve into for a long time, and from which I hope to retrieve quite a bit for the understanding of Plato himself. It seems to me that the principal deficiencies of the traditional interpretation of Plato—also in today's research— can be attributed to a large extent to the Christian tradition, thus making Islam a better point of departure from the start.

<sup>76</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations*, tr. R. J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge Press, Cambridge: 1997), pp. 57–124.

<sup>77</sup> See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 983b; the reference is to Thales.

38 Perne Road  
Cambridge

July 17, 1935

Dear Löwith,

...[only relevant excerpt] I can easily believe you, that Burckhardt was the ideal representative of ancient moderation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – but the themes of his philosophizing are possible only on the basis of modern "immoderation": no ancient philosopher was an historian. And this is due not to lack of the sixth sense, but precisely is due to the sense for what is appropriate for man to know, what his "mean and measure" is. No, dear Löwith, Burckhardt – that really won't do.

Now an end to the expectation.

Read Swift - who next to Lessing was the freest spirit of modernity.

Most cordially, your always devoted  
Leo Strauss.

3202 Oxford Ave., N.Y. 63  
August 15, 1946

Dear Löwith,

... [relevant excerpt] On the *querelle des anciens et des modernes*: I do not deny, but assert, that modern philosophy has much that is essential in common with Christian medieval philosophy; but that means that the *attack* of the moderns is directed decisively against *ancient* philosophy. By the way, in the minds of those concerned, Scholasticism was already disposed of in the sixteenth century, for one turned back from medieval philosophy to its sources, Plato-Aristotle and the Bible; the *new* in the seventeenth century is the repudiation of *everything* earlier (of that there is hardly anything in the sixteenth century – Bodin is an exception; Machiavelli disguised his *radical* critique precisely in the cloak of a return to Rome or Livy).

Further: the greatest exponents of the ancients' side in the *querelle*, that is, Swift and Lessing, knew that the real theme of the quarrel is antiquity and Christianity. (Do not come to me with the *completely* exoteric *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* or with Dilthey's platitudes; read the work against Klotz – *Antiquarische Briefe* – , *Wie die Alten den Tod gebildet*, *Laokoon* [the suffering of Philoctetes as opposed to the suffering of Jesus], *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*...) These men did not doubt that antiquity, that is, genuine philosophy, is an *eternal* possibility.

...

Most cordially yours,

Leo Strauss

I will not send the article to Wild; but it will be sent automatically to the Harvard Press. To whom should I send it, directly or through you? Please let me know.

England  
Dr. Leo Strauss  
Cambridge  
38 Perne Road

undated 1954

Dear Mr. Benardete,

Will you be so kind as to reread the passage on Chirone in *Principe* ch. 18—I have the impression that the half-man half-beast with its two natures who taught the ancient princes, has been replaced, *nei tempi moderni* [in modern times], by *uno mezzo Dio e mezzo uomo* [half-god half-man] with his two natures, who teaches modern princes, i.e. Chiron replaces again Christ. Hence *imitatio Chironis* [imitation of Chiron] replaces *imitatio Christi* [imitation of Christ]. Question: are not the “reasonable horses” of *Gulliver IV* really centaurs, and hence the lesson of *Gulliver* in this respect [is] identical with, and derived from, Machiavelli? Can you, with the library at your disposal, reconsider *Gulliver IV* with a view to this question: do these horses have any traits reminiscent of the Centaurs (I have in mind some rather subtle suggestions)?...”

Forgive the hurried lines.

Kindest regards to Mr. P.H.v.B [Peter von Blanckenhagen]. I hope that he has perfectly recovered.

Cordially,  
LS

10-6-64

Dear Mr. Bloom,

I thank you twice for your essay on Gulliver. It abounds with sensible and enjoyable conceits. Since I take a private interest in you, I am very happy to see with what firmness you talk, although you know very well that the English Departments (and the Anglican Church) will try to tear you to pieces.

That the Houy. have no gods can also be explained by the fact that they are the gods, i.e. the only beings surpassing men in wisdom and goodness. The Horse-Men also take the place of the God-Man. You probably did not say this because of its impropriety.

My best to you, Berns and Rush,

As ever yours,  
LS

---

We have found 33 references to Swift and his writings in the accessible Strauss opus. The references are summarized below and categorized. By far the largest category is the ancient vs. modern debate or return to classical thought/critique of modernity. For those that are simple references, we include the quote.

- a. *logica equina*: conviction that heads of state must not be saying “the thing which is not” if they repeat their statements but are never contradicted
- b. ancient v. modern debate/return to classical thought/critique of modernity
- c. influence of Machiavelli on *Gulliver’s Travels* (GT) Part IV, i.e. that men should be like Chiron, half man and half beast, or that Chiron replaces Christ
- d. critique of the commentators as not worthy to be with the philosophers about whom they comment, GT Part III
- e. on the poet’s art with respect to the legislator and the gods
- f. what is only of purely political importance, but not otherwise important, referring to the Lilliputians, perhaps the high vs. low sole and big-endians vs. little-endians, GT Part, I
- g. problem of the immortals in not being able to reach the peak of man, GT Part III

1. PAW: a
2. Hobbes preface: b

3. NRH beginning of Rousseau section: b “Rousseau was not the first to feel that the modern venture was a radical error and to seek the remedy in a return to classical thought. It suffices to mention the name of Swift.”
4. TOM: c
5. WIPP: b “If one denies this [that there are things that can only be seen with the unarmed eye or from the perspective of the citizen], one will repeat the experience of Gulliver with the nurse in Brobdingnag and become entangled in the kind of research projects by which he was amazed in Laputa.”
6. On Classical Political Philosophy: b
7. Origin of Modern Political Thought: b
8. Historicism: b
9. How to Study Medieval Philosophy: d
10. Progress or Return: b
11. New School Seminar: not put in a category, since it is just a course description
12. Laws: e
13. Statesman: a
14. Politics: b
15. Xenophon 1: c
16. Xenophon 2: d
17. Aristotle’s Ethics 1: c – Aristotle would disagree with the possibility of thinking quadrupeds
18. Aristotle’s Ethics 2: b – reference to the sheep without wool in GT Part III
19. Vico: b – reference to the people who point to objects in lieu of language in GT Part III
20. Grotius: b – reference to the sheep without wool in GT Part III
21. Intro. to Pol. Phil. 1: b – Gulliver in Brobdingnag, like looking through a microscope, i.e. a product of modern philosophy
22. Intro. to Pol. Phil. 2: a – although a different point regarding the same thing than in PAW
23. Intro. to Pol. Phil. 3: b
24. Intro. to Pol. Phil. 4: b
25. Intro. to Pol. Phil. 5: f
26. Montesquieu: b – reference to the sheep without wool in GT Part III
27. Meno: b – problem of prudence in modernity, i.e. in the Academy of Lagado in GT Part III
28. Nietzsche: g
29. Krüger: b – “(By the way, Swift is a very odd and, for you, I believe, very important man—he opposed the entire modern development with incredible awareness.)”
30. Löwith 1: b “Read Swift - who next to Lessing was the freest spirit of modernity.”
31. Löwith 2: b “the greatest exponents of the ancients’ side in the querelle, that is, Swift and Lessing, knew that the real theme of the quarrel is antiquity and Christianity.”
32. Benardete: c
33. Bloom: c