

age citizen except through the post-office gave way to a more centralized polity that taxed the people directly and created an internal revenue bureau to collect these taxes, drafted men in the army, expanded the jurisdiction of federal courts, created a national currency and a national banking system, and established the first national agency for social welfare—the Freedmen’s Bureau. Eleven of the first twelve amendments to the Constitution had limited the powers of the national government; six of the next seven, beginning with the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, vastly expanded those powers at the expense of the states.

The Republican Party was the product of 19th-century nationalism. It favored Northern commercial interests and sought to expand the reach of federal power both domestically and internationally. In 1853, William Henry Seward, who would become Lincoln’s secretary of state, spoke of the need to “exercise a paramount influence in the affairs of the nations situated in this hemisphere.” His national-greatness policy constitutes what, “in the language of many, is called ‘progress’ and the position itself is what, by the same class, is called ‘manifest destiny.’” Applying the Monroe Doctrine to Cuba and Canada was insufficient. “You are already,” he told his audience, “the great continental power of America. But does that content you? I trust it does not. You want the commerce of the world, which is the empire of the world.” In his Lincoln biography, George McGovern reminds his readers of the 1864 Republican Party platform, which called for the “vigorous implementation of the Monroe Doctrine.” The grand nationalist ambitions of the Republican Party leaders could not be fulfilled without a strong central government. Gone forever was the memory of Washington’s plea for a humble republic that would avoid foreign entanglements. Republican plans were greatly, though temporar-

ily, frustrated by the departure of the Southern states from the Union.

Some neoconservatives find inspiration in the political rhetoric of early Republican Party leaders. Recall, for instance, the complaint of William Kristol and David Brooks in the *Wall Street Journal* that “today’s conservatism” does not “appeal to American greatness.” Yet we know from experience that “national greatness” thinking usually results in the centralization of power and the loss of individual liberty. And this goes hand in hand with the “big-government conservatism” that is so often defended when Republicans are in power. When asked by E.J. Dionne whether he and Brooks thought the New Deal was a mistake, Kristol replied, “Are we willing to say that the country is worse off because of FDR or JFK or LBJ? I’m not willing to say that.” At least in the minds of some neoconservatives, Lincoln’s principles do not conflict with New Deal liberalism. “Our nationalism is that of an exceptional nation founded on a universal principle,” wrote Kristol and Brooks, “on what Lincoln called ‘an abstract truth, applicable to all men and all times.’” Kristol and Brooks represent the views of many in the Republican Party establishment. For instance, Republican presidential speechwriter Michael Gerson wants us to believe that our founding documents—as interpreted by Lincoln—require our military to “fight for the liberty of strangers.”

Ultimately, the blame for this tendency to view Father Abraham as the initiator of the imperial presidency must be placed at Lincoln’s feet. As Edward S. Corwin argued in his 1941 essay “The Aggrandizement of Presidential Power,” Lincoln established two precedents. The president could respond to matters that he thought presented actual or potential violence and may endanger the nation’s interests without undue concern for congressional or state objections. Thus, later presidents could use “Lincoln’s acts as if they supposed the thesis of presidential autonomy—in other words, presidential autocracy—in other fields of presidential power.” Lin-

coln exercised presidential power in ways the Supreme Court found illegal, yet the unconstitutionality of his policies has yet to tarnish his reputation among his “conservative” devotees. To preserve the Union, Lincoln pursued an undeniably laudable end using immoral means that destroyed the Old Republic by removing with violent force obstacles to the centralization of federal power.

In *National Review*, another student of Strauss, Charles Kesler, tells us that conservatives, eager to take back the Republican Party from its “liberal wing,” were inspired by Jaffa’s writings to employ “Lincoln’s principles” of “human equality, liberty, and natural-rights-based constitutionalism.” These abstract rights have not preserved conservative principles; they have compromised them. Liberal Republicans faithfully took Lincoln’s abstract theories to their logical conclusion. Were the affirmative-action policies of the Nixon administration or the corporate-welfare spending long favored by the GOP really unrelated to the founding principles of the Party of Lincoln?

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POLITICAL THEORY

Pulling the Wool Over Their Eyes: A Straussian Memoir

by Kenneth Zaretzke

You may be taken aback by the first part of my title, but do not be. Wool, after all, is that which warms us. In the Ice Age, pulling wool over the eyes was tantamount to survival. That sense lingers in the phrase “pull the wool over your eyes”—or *their* eyes, as we say, referring to those who need our protection. Not just protection from cold weather but from cold

truths.

The second part of my title designates this as a memoir—a Straussian memoir, to be precise. Hence, I begin with a recondite question: “What is what?” Or rather, “What is *the* what?” That question, which appears to be a mere epigram, captures the profound emptiness of what nowadays masquerades as philosophy. When Threnos first asked this question, in that half-ironic form, he bore witness to why he is one of the most penetrating, albeit most obscure, of the ancients.

Threnos understood the what as a prefigurement of political philosophy. He understood himself to be refuting the most fabled of the skeptics, who denied the peremptoriness of the good and who denigrated political philosophy, which makes the good possible. Threnos comes after Plato and in some ways transcends him.

In Threnos’ passion for the life of the mind there was a sturdy and workmanlike confidence in reason properly understood. By “the what,” Threnos did not mean what we, amid the multitudinous debasements of modern thought, would call what. What *we* call what is but a vulgar version of what the ancients called the what. *The* what could not be more different than mere “what” standing alone. *The* what points to a way of thinking much favored by the best of the ancients. It bestrides mere “what” like a colossus. And it does something else. It speaks the truth—not the mere truth of the matter, but the truth as such, which is not necessarily the truth of the absolute.

To speak of *the* what, in this exalted sense, is to understand the seriousness of the ancients when they attacked every form of skepticism and nihilism. I would go even further than this: To speak of *the* what is to speak of humanliness. Oddly, there is no word in the language of the ancients that captures the meaning of this English word, yet in everything they did and said, the best thinkers of the past not only embraced it but embodied it.

Humanliness, note well, is not a species of what some people choose to call anthropocentrism. An intel-

ligent Martian possesses aspects of humanliness. The idea of humanliness, as I said, is not anthropocentric. But having mentioned anthropocentrism, which is central to the social sciences, I must also say something about science, which is inferior to poetry. I mean poetry rightly interpreted: When badly interpreted, poetry is positively harmful—which is another way of saying that one must read with care. In science, there is no *reading*. There is only doing, experimenting, technologizing. Even cosmologists, those fanciers of imagined worlds, merely spin mathematical formulas in their heads. They don’t read anything in the course of their duties. Above all, they don’t read anything that requires careful interpretation, which is all-important.

Plato and Threnos grasped this profound truth more keenly than any other thinker; and those who advise princes, by which I mean politicians, would do well to understand this—and also to understand Plato as he understood himself. The latter is, of course, no easy task. But given the right teachers, it is not an impossible task.

I must add that part of that task, in a democracy, involves responding in the proper way to Tocqueville. The illustrious Frenchman is the most truly gentlemanly of the true gentlemen. He knew that the source of motivation in the *demos* cannot be the will of the people, for the people are often blind. Nor can it be the aristocratic elite, for even the best aristocrats typically lack the fullness of esoteric understanding. What suffices for fully understanding the contemporary *demos* is the properly mediated wisdom of the ancients—Threnos, Socrates, Thucydides, when properly read. Tocqueville may not have said much about this, but he knew the truth of it.

What Tocqueville knew is that in the ancient writers is to be found *nous*—knowledge, knowingness. The “light of knowledge” is the traditional metaphor here. To be sure, there is that of which one dare not speak, because knowing it is too dangerous; Maimonides on Y---h is the best example of this in regard to the history of reve-

lation. In the domain of reason, too, *nous* has certain limitations. “Human-kind cannot bear too much reality.” The truth—the *whole* truth—is not for everyone, and that is why *nous* must be properly understood. It is also why only great philosophers can shed light on the ultimate things: the good, the true, and the beautiful. (Why not also love? Notice that love is not accompanied by the tell-tale article: We do not refer to *the* love. Is that not remarkable? It may be that love is not one of the ultimate things, though it is surely one of the important things. It has its own grandeur, but it inhabits a realm utterly different from that of the good, the true, and the beautiful.)

These ultimate things inhabit the realm of *telos*, which is the keystone of politics and which is often mangled by modern thinkers. It does not simply refer to the end, or purpose, of nature or of human striving. It points more fundamentally to the goal-seeking of the great man, whatever his particular goal happens to be. In greatness of spirit and greatness of achievement is to be found the true nature of *telos*. The great man is the personification of *telos*—this was well understood by Threnos and, to a lesser extent, by Plato.

The point is? The point is that a proper comprehension of *telos* helps us to remember the importance of remembering. To refer to remembering is to refer to the past, which ought not to be ignored. No one knows the past; one can only remember it. But let me remind you that this is a *Straussian* memoir. The task before me, thus, is much more than remembering the importance of remembrance or the importance of the past, rightly understood. It is something bigger. It is no less than the excavation of human knowledge. That is the real point. And, thus, I must turn to anthropology.

I am an anthropologist of the academy, like most contemporary Straussians. Hence, in a memoir it is fitting for me to remember when, as a student, I heard the lectures of Leo Strauss. Now, much has been written of the Straussian brand of discipleship. But what I will say is that the intellectual intoxication, such as it was,

was spiritually sober. The experience lifted the soul as it is best lifted, in an understanding of the greatness of the ancients and the importance of political philosophy. Political philosophy is the greatest thing that can be apprehended by the soul here and now, in this temporal realm. I do not speak of the transcendent, which is merely the domain of religion.

Before us fortunate students was the very embodiment of the mastery and mystery of the permanent things. We were enthralled, but more than that we were illuminated, as few of our peers elsewhere could ever be. Some among us did not quite understand the teachings, and of course none of us understood them as fully as did our great teacher. Those who understood the teachings adequately were given an exceptional gift, the gift of understanding history's greatest thinkers as they understood themselves. They understood themselves esoterically, wherein the wool is pulled over the eyes—but one must not speak too plainly.

I speak boldly of a "Straussian" memoir. What can this be? A memoir is a display of one's life and purported experience. But the followers of the true teaching are not interested in experience, but in wisdom. So the memoir I am presenting to you must concern itself with the wisdom of the discerning mind and the prepared heart. It is a memoir not only of a life but, more importantly, of the timeless things. These things constitute the memoir that is called "Straussian." Yet it must be borne in mind that this is merely a crude label. A better label would be: lovers of the ancient teaching, properly understood.

Let me share with you a little story. Not so long ago, one of my most brilliant students asked me: How do I achieve a unique greatness, and how can I know when it is unique? That deep and impressive question was enough to provoke a two-hours-long response from me; regrettably it was not recorded. But my reply to my student may be summed up very specifically: You will achieve an impressive greatness by writing, for the edifica-

tion of the *demos*, a Straussian biography of Paul Wolfowitz while remembering, in the proper way, that a sucker is born every minute.

This advice was well received, I'm happy to report, and I eagerly left for Allan Bloom's latest *soirée*. My further meditations on the nature of *the* what would have to wait.

Kenneth Zaretzke writes from Seattle.

LAW

Who Are You? The Law of Status

by Gerald Russello

What do veterans, drug users, children, and suspected terrorists have in common? They all have specialized courts to deal with them and their legal issues. Illinois has become the latest state to set up a special "veterans' court" to handle veterans charged with nonviolent crimes. (New York has had a similar program in place since early last year.) The court will not only adjudicate offenses but connect veterans to a range of services and programs that are meant to prevent them from becoming repeat offenders. The judge organizing this court has even selected veterans to serve as prosecutors and defense attorneys.

The first family courts date from the 1960's and Great Society-like initiatives meant to address "root causes" of dysfunctional behavior. Their origins, however, stretch back a century or more to the orphans' courts and reform houses established by the community organizers of the Gilded Age. Rather than simply punish, their advocates thought, courts should rehabilitate those offenders who were thought to be reformable.

The existence of such specialized courts raises some interesting questions for American law. Equality before the law is supposed to be a protection against the assertion of arbitrary power. At its most banal, there is the

enforced frustration of waiting around in a courthouse all day while being considered for jury duty. Everyone there is at the same level, and 12 (in the classic formulation) will be randomly selected to judge whatever is on the docket. But specialized courts explicitly assign people a forum based on who they are, a forum denied other people because of who they are. A nonveteran, in other words, is out of luck, at least with regard to the attention the law will give him. In a world of increasingly straitened resources, favored status may come to mean better treatment by the legal system.

The old common-law system was comfortable with different laws for different folks. The British common law, for example, had long made room for ecclesiastical courts, which dealt with a range of offenses and controversies. The defense known as "benefit of the clergy," for example, lasted in the United Kingdom until the early 19th century. Although eventually available to anyone who could read, this defense was originally meant to keep clergy from the harsher penalties of the secular courts. It was, in other words, a classic type of status-based court. In the Middle Ages conflicts between feudal tribunals were presided over by the local noble, with a king's justice seeking to impose uniformity over the nation.

The common characteristics of these courts are secrecy, a lack of what we would usually consider due process, and a wide scope within which the judge can act. The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, known as FISC, conducts its proceedings, like the Star Chamber, in secrecy. Generally, only the government gets to present its case before the FISC. While these courts do not fit with our culture's current hyperegaltarian rhetoric, as they are quite clearly institutions that promise unequal treatment based on either variable (veteran) or temporarily invariable (child) status, they do square nicely with our obsession with identity politics. If the government can pull you over for being of a certain "type," then maybe you should be able to demand your own court to see if the ac-