For the Love of the Bourgeois: 
A Comparative Analysis of Paul Gottfried’s and Leo Strauss’s 
Defenses of the Liberal Democratic West

The Canadian Tory political philosopher George Grant once related the “impossibility of conservatism” to the “ridiculous task” of preserving tradition in the modern age of progress. How could conservatives protect their cherished institutions and customs in an age dedicated to technological and social transformation? Grant was particularly preoccupied with the survival of his own nation, whose existential “impossibility” mirrored the impossibility of conservatism as a whole. By the early 1960s, Grant contended in his most famous work, *Lament for a Nation*, that Canada had been inexorably drawn into the orbit of American liberal hegemony as its elites abandoned the last remnants of the old British conservatism that once defined the nation. What Grant lamented here was more than the loss of his country; it was the vanishing of the classical virtues that predated the age of progress and the rise of the United States. The ancient and medieval philosophers who had defended these virtues would have scorned the modern privileging of progress over tradition, material consumption over moderation, and mass democracy over the rule of wise elites.

Like many postwar conservatives, Grant turned to the ideas of Leo Strauss in order to recover this lost premodern understanding of politics and mores. Grant was not unique among conservatives in appreciating Strauss’s core teaching that the moderns had not succeeded in refuting the ancients; they had not “progressed” beyond antiquity. It was sheer hubris of the modern mind to reduce all philosophical questions to their historic context in the vain hope of demonstrating that there was no such thing as “eternal”
truths that resonated with human beings throughout the ages. Although Grant despaired over the prospect of ever persuading the materialistic, technologically obsessed masses to think beyond the parochialism of the modern age, he never doubted that Strauss offered the most sophisticated attempt to comprehend the implications of the fateful modern decision to embrace historical change at the expense of the timeless virtues.4

It is Strauss's teaching on "historicism" in particular that attracted conservatives like Grant who anxiously witnessed the death of the way of life that predated the age of progress. In Strauss's eyes, this teaching must be absolutely uncompromising in its rejection of the modern tendency to equate all thought as "historical" and deny the eternal in turn.5 What Strauss meant by the "eternal" includes "universal or abstract" principles that presuppose the existence of a permanent human nature, irreducible to mere historical context. The very foundation of a philosophy of "natural right," as Strauss famously posed it, centers around the possibility of an existing nature that transcends petty differences based on culture, faith, or history.6 The modern historicist denial that any such eternal principle exists, Strauss contended, ultimately leads to the denial of truth itself. For if all ideas are mere epiphenomena of history, then there cannot be an absolutely true idea apart from its parochial historical origins. What is "true" in one historical period cannot possibly be "true" in another. It is not that Strauss is guilty of denying the importance of historical context. Indeed, he recognizes that context was always on the minds of the best philosophers throughout the ages, as they sought to adapt their thought to the often persecutory ages in which they lived.7 Nevertheless, this awareness of context does not mean that they were entirely "under the spell" of their historical situations, as Strauss believes historicists insist. This reduction of all philosophic thought to context returns to haunt historicism itself, Strauss warns, since it is then impossible to demonstrate the eternal validity of historicism on foundations that deny eternity in the first place.8 Strauss even went so far as to castigate conservatives, particularly Edmund Burke, for repudiating any universal (eternal)
principles on the spurious grounds that these are “revolutionary” and thus unconservative. If conservatives dismissively equate all forms of universalism with Jacobin radicalism, Strauss believed, then their own cherished traditions become merely relative to their time, not true for all time.9

For the last 25 years, Paul Gottfried has lamented the uncritical susceptibility of conservatives to the Straussian understanding of history. Although he has not written extensively on the works of Grant, Gottfried has regularly reminded scores of postwar conservatives who have embraced Strauss’s teachings on the dangers of jettisoning historically grounded truths in favor of metaphysical abstractions. Since the publication of his first major work on the perils of ahistorical conservatism, he has always stood with the example of Burke, the first conservative to denounce grand claims about timeless truths. In The Search for Historical Meaning: Hegel and the Postwar American Right, Gottfried is as adamantly in favor of Burke’s historicism as Strauss is opposed to it. Nothing less than the survival of conservatism itself is at stake if conservatives abandon Burke in favor of Strauss: “By opposing this line of [historically based] reasoning, modern conservatives have rejected the heart of traditional European conservatism from the eighteenth century almost to the present day.”10

In his most recent work on postwar American conservatism, Conservatism in America: Making Sense of the American Right, Gottfried continues to stand with Burke (along with Joseph de Maistre, Karl Mannheim, and other European traditionalists) in denouncing the “abstract universals” so dear to contemporary rightists.11 In this vein, the main focus of his new work is to decry “value conservatism,” a movement of the post-World War II Right that takes its intellectual bearings from Strauss. Value conservatives are chiefly concerned with the preservation of abstract “values” that the cultural Left threatens. These values, which privilege conservative morality over leftist permissiveness in the areas of family, sexuality, and social engineering, are allegedly “eternal.” The folly of value conservatism, in Gottfried’s view, stems from the dubious premise that these values are “timeless” and therefore
stand above “classes, tribes, and even nations.” 12 While Gottfried does not oppose the value conservatives’ resistance to the leftist social revolutions that the convulsions of the 1960s inaugurated, he vehemently rejects the ahistorical metaphysics that underpins this new “conservatism.” It is implausible of value conservatives to deride their leftist opponents as “moral relativists” (or historicists) on the grounds that their enemies lack any notion of the good. 13 Although Gottfried is hardly sympathetic with the New Left and its numerous heirs that hold high office in government and academia today, he has never been persuaded that historicists and positivists of the Left or Right are “permissive” or “nihilistic” in their understanding of morality simply because they believe that values lack absolute status. 14 Indeed, the irony here is that value conservatism is no more eternally grounded than cultural Marxism. (In addition, anyone who has completed even a cursory reading of Dialectic of Enlightenment knows that Adorno and Horkheimer are as viscerally opposed to value-free positivism as Strauss is.) Just as Strauss delighted in exposing the self-contradictory historicist view that all truths (including historicism) are historically relative, so Gottfried relishes exposing the value conservatives’ conceit that their values are eternal when in fact they originate from a particular historical context (postwar America).

Although Gottfried devotes less space to the influence of Strauss in this book than in previous ones, he once again lays the blame for value conservatism at the feet of this controversial political philosopher. In fairness to the man, Strauss detested the word “value” as far inferior in meaning to that of “virtue,” since the former implied a subjective and arbitrary manifestation of human will that the latter rejects. 15 Strauss also usually considered himself a liberal, not a conservative, since the latter breed often confused the merely “ancestral” with the good and therefore lacked an appreciation for a universal sense of right, a position that Strauss thought was indistinguishable from historicism or relativism. 16 Nevertheless, Gottfried portrays Strauss, the chief “guru” of neoconservatism, as the principal hero of the postwar Right in the battle against value relativism and historicism. 17 As he shows
throughout his work, anyone familiar with the writings of Strauss’s most famous followers like Harry Jaffa, Allan Bloom, or Irving Kristol can trace their anti-relativist diatribes back to the teachings of the master. As an unabashed historicist, Gottfried relentlessly insists that conservatives must spurn all talk of “values” unless these are situated in the particular historical periods from which they herald.

Even though the choice between Strauss the universalist and Gottfried the historicist appears to be clear and categorical for their numerous conservative readers, it is imperative to understand the full implications of making this choice, one way or the other. Both Strauss and Gottfried see their roles as defenders of Western Civilization. Indeed, despite their shared respect for antiquity and the Middle Ages, both men admire the modern West for cultivating a degree of intellectual liberty that the enemies of liberal democracy on the Left and Right have failed to appreciate. Despite his critique of modern social contract theory’s predisposition towards a permissive morality, Strauss never denies that the freedom philosophers enjoy in Western democracies is a grand blessing worth fighting for. Gottfried, in turn, admires modern conservatives like Burke for defending a decent and humane form of government that institutionalizes the rule of law and ordered liberty.

In short, both Strauss and Gottfried defend an older version of liberalism (now conservatism?), albeit from vastly different premises. Naturally, the question that arises here is does historicism or natural right universalism best understand and defend the cause of the liberal West? The remainder of my paper is taken up with answering this question through a comparative analysis of Strauss’s and Gottfried’s concepts of universalism and historicism. In the process, I hope to make clear that a synthesis of historicism and universalism is not only desirable but even essential in defending what is left of liberalism in the current Western hegemony. Contra historicists, it is my contention that not all universalisms ought to be rejected as either false or suspect. It is impossibly hard to imagine the West without the moral universalism of Christianity, whose
benevolent ethic of charity (*agape*) has shaped this civilization for two millennia. *Contra* natural right universalists, this universalism (whose political implications I have explored in a recent book on Abraham Lincoln's interpretation of biblical charity and its role in modern democracy[^19]) was not shared by the ancient Greeks. Ultimately, the modern Christian West is that paradoxical civilization whose universalistic morality is grounded in a particular history.

**The Two Universalisms: The Quarrel Between the Ancients and the Moderns**

Both Gottfried and Strauss genuinely respect the bourgeois liberal West and often exhibit great unease in their writings over the future of a civilization that is unique for its sanctioning of liberty. Indeed, both thinkers consider themselves liberals. In his trilogy on the rise of the new twentieth-century interventionist state, Gottfried consistently diagnoses the fatal threat that this new Leviathan poses to traditional liberalism. In *After Liberalism: Mass Democracy in the Managerial State* (1999), he laments the breakdown of social constraint, individual responsibility, and deferred gratification. Now that the managerial welfare state has marginalized these bourgeois mores in favor of leftist social engineering directed against the family and other private institutions, Gottfried feels no reason to be optimistic about the survival of the old bourgeois liberalism that once resisted this state.[^20] In the same work, he doubts that values-talk is an effective bulwark against this state, particularly when the neoconservative manifestation of this state expands rather than decreases its powers in order to teach “values.”[^21] In *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt: Toward a Secular Theocracy* (2002), Gottfried shows how the therapeutic state, a successor to the managerial state, further advances the extinction of the old bourgeois morality by taking on powers to “modify” the behavior of pathologically “bigoted” populations who are insufficiently tolerant of historically oppressed minorities. In *The Strange Death of Marxism: The European Left in the New Millennium* (2005), Gottfried documents the devolution of the Left
from a predominantly Marxist force that justifiably suspected the dangers of increasing statist powers towards a post-Marxist Left that accepts with enthusiasm a managerial/therapeutic state bent on eradicating the history and culture of decayed bourgeois cultures.

In *Conservatism in America*, Gottfried builds on his previous works on the death of bourgeois liberalism when he turns his analytical guns on the “neoconservative” movement whose lip service to the old bourgeois ethos should not blind us, Gottfried contends, to its acceptance of this new twentieth-century state. Echoing the themes of *After Liberalism*, Gottfried continues to decry this Leviathan state that persists in creating programs “aimed at the family, health-care choices, and behavioral or attitudinal control intended to render citizens ‘sensitive’ as well as physically sound.” What is particularly galling to Gottfried is the relative inattention that neoconservatives (who are more enthusiastic than some value-conservatives about the benefits of democracy) pay to the growth of this state, as they celebrate an interventionist state that spreads “eternal” democratic values around the world. If there is one running theme to all of these works, it is Gottfried’s sincere appreciation of the old liberal mores and his outrage over the Left’s statist assault upon these commendable virtues, an assault that the postwar Right’s embrace of democratic universalism also facilitates.

At first glance, there appears to be precious little here that differentiates Gottfried from Strauss. Despite the claims of critics who spy a consistent anti-liberalism in his works, Strauss always praised liberal democracy as a “friend,” not as a “flatterer” of its excesses. In one of his earliest works, his study of Hobbes, Strauss’s recognition that modern social contract theory replaced aristocratic virtue with bourgeois self-gratification does not prevent him from admitting that this new modern regime possesses “the virtues of civilized men”; indeed, Hobbes, the principal defender of this regime, is a true heir of “classical antiquity” in opposing the “baseness” of human arrogance and cruelty. The evidence for Strauss’s own appreciation of the old liberalism is ample enough to
refute the common leftist charge, famously made by Shadia Drury, Stephen Holmes, and Nicolas Xenos, that Strauss is an anti-liberal guru of the European Far Right. Indeed, Strauss took pains to praise liberalism as the most decent political ideology that humanity had ever fashioned. In *Liberalism: Ancient and Modern*, the running theme of Strauss’s essays is the consistent message that liberalism at its best promotes virtues that are essential to the functioning of a democracy. Like Gottfried, Strauss distinguishes between the old liberalism that supports the verities of “quality, excellence, or virtue” and the new “perverted liberalism” that teaches “that just to live, securely and happily, and protected but otherwise unregulated, is man’s simple but supreme goal.” The survival of what Strauss calls “liberal education” is pivotal, since it is the only means by which citizens can learn the virtue of moderation that strengthens their resolve against the permissiveness of modern society. Yet Strauss is no less pessimistic than Gottfried on the likelihood that an education in the “Great Works” of Western Civilization will prevail against the radical egalitarianism of mass society that erases all necessary distinctions between the high and the low, the excellent and the mediocre. Although Strauss credits democracy for giving freedom “to those who care for human excellence,” he joins Gottfried as well as many other classical liberals in considering “mass democracy” the greatest threat to both liberal education and to the liberty that breathes life into philosophy. Mass democracy, with its conformist tendencies, threatens the very liberalism that once ushered democracy into being.

In short, both Strauss and Gottfried give every indication that they seek to defend what is left of the liberal tradition that defines the West. Both men would heartily agree that the old classical liberalism of natural rights is the fundamental tradition of American political philosophy, a heritage that neither scholar takes for granted in the face of statism and democratic leveling. Strauss would not dispute Gottfried’s judgment that America has always been a predominantly liberal nation. Indeed, Gottfried follows Louis Hartz as much as some Straussians in his famous teaching that liberalism never faced any serious rivals in influence for most
of America’s political history. The fact that both Strauss and Gottfried respect the old liberalism, however, should not obscure the more fundamental difference between their two approaches to political philosophy. Unlike Gottfried, Strauss celebrates this older liberalism due to what he understands to be its categorically universal approach to the subject of human nature. True liberals, Strauss believes, have always assumed that there is a universal good that all human beings can grasp and appreciate. Most importantly, this liberalism historically originated in the classical polis of Athens, where it was brilliantly articulated and defended in the works of Plato and Aristotle. As Strauss puts it in his preface to *Liberalism: Ancient and Modern*, “premodern political philosophy, and in particular classical political philosophy, is liberal in the original sense of the term. It cannot be simply conservative since it is guided by the awareness that all man seek by nature, not the ancestral or traditional, but the good.” What Strauss means by “nature” here is clearly an allusion to the Platonic-Aristotelian view that all human beings desire the good, even if they are ultimately ignorant of it. From this Greek metaphysics Strauss derives the core teaching of his political philosophy: that the dangerous doctrines of historicism and relativism, with their extreme emphasis on historical and cultural particularity, should not obscure the truth that there is one human nature in search of the good, virtuous life. Moreover, a liberal democracy is best suited to permit, without actually satisfying, the cultivation of this longing for virtue. As one admirer puts it, Strauss’s “Platonic liberalism bespeaks a Churchillian defense of democracy as the worse except for all the alternatives.”

In sharp contrast to the conventionally modern view that the Enlightenment was the first period in history to defend the cause of freedom, Strauss maintains that Greek political philosophy must be credited with this accomplishment, “since liberal or constitutional democracy comes closer to what the classics demanded than any alternative that is viable in our age.” Indeed, Strauss blames the modern age, particularly the historicist nineteenth century, for rendering this classical teaching practically “obsolete.” When
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Strauss praises Plato and Aristotle for expounding in a “classic” manner “the standards of freedom and civilization,” he means that only these Greek thinkers (and a few of their medieval heirs, like Maimonides) understood that true freedom must be founded upon a virtuous life, or at least an openness to that life. Moderns like Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, and their various heirs fatefully neglected this classical teaching as they forged a civilization that replaced the virtue of self-control with the vice of libertinism.32

One need not accept the controversial portrayal of Plato as a “totalitarian” (popularized by Karl Popper in the 1960s) to question the validity of Strauss’s determination to project liberalism of any kind upon antiquity. Liberal institutions and practices like the separation of church and state, equality before the law, and freedom of conscience were all woefully absent even in a democratic polis like classical Athens. The fact that this city put Socrates to death for what he thought, an act that can justly be described as illiberal, does not dissuade Strauss from believing that liberalism had a place within the political philosophy of the Greeks. Even though Socrates, in Plato’s Apology, neither questions the right of Athens to put him on trial for intellectual sedition nor invokes the “liberal” credo that he has the freedom to question his own regime,33 none of these details dissuades Strauss from spying true liberal universalism in Platonic and Aristotelian thought. Strauss’s most famous answer to these challenging facts is that even liberal Athens possessed a threshold of tolerance that Socrates rashly ignored with his relentless and corrosive questioning of Greek virtues. Socrates misused the freedom that Athens otherwise afforded to him and all other philosophers when he turned his nihilistic questioning against its fragile foundations.34 True liberals must learn from the fate of Socrates the harsh lesson that the freedom to philosophize is not a license for fatal questioning of a decent democratic regime that makes this freedom possible in the first place.

In short, the true universalism, or “natural right,” that fortifies the political philosophy of the West lies with Greek political philosophy, not with the modern Enlightenment, since the classics were more sophisticated than the rapacious moderns in their practice of
intellectual freedom. What Strauss means by “liberal education” is not the Enlightenment dream of educating the masses in the art of Socratic rationalism, since whole citizen populations in a democracy may reject the decency and stability of this regime. A truly liberal man, Strauss writes in an essay on liberal education, is a free man who also possesses the virtue of “civic responsibility,” or a sincere devotion to the good of his regime.35 This duty is based on a universal concept of the good, not a conventional (relative, historical) one that simply reflects what the regime means by the good. The true liberal subordinates the pleasure of Socratic questioning to the duty of good citizenship, since he never forgets that even a decent regime like democracy can go to the bad with the adoption of bad laws and conventions. The virtue of patriotism itself is not sufficient if the patriot forgets that what is good for himself must be good for all human beings by nature. “For what it means to be a good citizen depends entirely on the regime. A good citizen in Hitler’s Germany could be a bad citizen elsewhere. … The meaning of good man is always and everywhere the same.”36

It is perhaps understandable that Strauss, like many of his contemporaries, sought a recovery of Hellenic virtues after the disasters of two world wars in the twentieth century, when the bourgeois Christian order was on the verge of collapse. He was not the only political philosopher to entertain serious doubts about “progress” after the mass slaughter of millions of lives in the first half of that century. As a reader of Spengler’s Der Untergang des Abendlandes, Strauss was hardly unique in expressing rather pessimistic sentiments about the future of the West.37 Readers can find comparable doubts in the works of his fellow émigrés Hannah Arendt and Eric Voegelin, who also spurned modern progressivist thought in favor of a recovery of Platonic political philosophy. Despite Strauss’s spirited defense of a universal liberal good that Greek political philosophy presumably taught, however, he remains vulnerable to the historicist charge that he is projecting a universalism upon the Greeks where no such animal existed. In his study of Carl Schmitt’s contribution to political philosophy, Gottfried takes aim at the Straussian position that Greek notions of justice and
virtue are so universal that even a modern democracy like America can readily adapt them. In scrutinizing the desperate efforts of Strauss's student Walter Berns to ground American republicanism upon Greek (that is, Platonic) statecraft, Gottfried pours doubt upon the compatibility of a modern democratic regime with classical Greek city-states. The Greek *politai* were practically xenophobic realms, severely restricted along the lines of ethnicity and family. Although Straussians might respond that these regimes bear little resemblance to the more virtuous utopia described in Plato's *Republic*, Gottfried doubts that the degree of control and unity required by the authoritarian philosopher-guardians would do any better in allowing the flourishing of liberal ideals like freedom of conscience and personal identity. In true historicist fashion, Gottfried disputes the attempts of moderns like Berns to ignore gaping historical differences between antiquity and modernity.

Unfortunately, from Gottfried's perspective, the sheer force of the historical record has not dissuaded Strauss's neoconservative and value-conservative followers in the postwar American Right from downplaying the historic specificity of the conservative tradition they purport to defend. Instead, neoconservatives who dream of a new democratic world order created by force of American arms ignore the particular origins of American democracy, historic antecedents that cannot be exported elsewhere. In *Conservatism in America*, Gottfried situates American conservatism squarely within a "bourgeois liberal tradition, fed by American Protestantism," not Socratic rationalism. The conservatives who opposed the New Deal, as well as an expansionist foreign policy, overwhelmingly heralded from this bourgeois liberal demographic. This collection of "small-town dissenters, nonconformist isolationists and bohemian litterateurs" formed the main resistance towards both the managerial state and the statist conservative movement that advanced its powers in the postwar decades. As a consequence, those "who held to a skeptical attitude about American overseas involvements, while harping on the need to dismantle the American welfare state, were soon driven into the wilderness" after World War II. Gottfried's analysis here raises at least two pivotal
questions for any reader of Strauss and his numerous followers: if America’s political traditions are historically rooted in the nation’s Protestantism, is this tradition compatible with a romanticized Greek universalism? In addition, which is the true source of America’s “universal” values—Athens or (Christian) Jerusalem?

Although Strauss wrote a few influential essays on the tension between Athens and Jerusalem as the two founding traditions of the West, what he meant by “Jerusalem” typically meant his ancestral faith of Judaism. As numerous readers of Strauss have often pointed out, Strauss writes almost nothing about Christianity’s contribution to political philosophy. He never engages the Thomistic contribution to political philosophy in any sustained manner (apart from a few passing remarks in *Natural Right and History*), nor does he give much credence to the overtly religious claims of secular philosophers like Hobbes, Spinoza, or Locke, claims which Strauss dismissed as insincere. Strauss always taught that a tension existed between Athens and Jerusalem precisely because reason and faith were natural antagonists. A life of Socratic questioning is in no way compatible with a life of obedient and dogmatic obedience. Whatever the validity of this dualistic hermeneutic, it still does not quite explain why Strauss believed that the real universalism of the West lies with Plato and Aristotle, not with the Gospels.

The fact that students of Strauss can often oppose the same political practices as Gottfried should not overshadow the fact that their respective opposition once again originates from starkly different premises with regard to the meaning of Western Civilization. To be sure, it is not fair to claim, as Gottfried’s fellow paleoconservative Sam Francis often did, that neoconservatives support every aspect of the managerial state. It is legitimate, however, to probe the radically distinct rationales that paleoconservatives like Gottfried and neoconservative Straussians employ in order to justify their attack on the modern Leviathan state. For example, Gottfried and the Straussian legal scholar Hadley Arkes often sound identical in their dislike of the social engineering that this state has foisted upon the American public for the past 40 years.
In *After Liberalism*, Gottfried faults Americans and other citizens of Western democracies for giving away “the responsibility of self-government for themselves and their polity, in return for what they value more, sexual and expressive freedoms of a certain kind and the apparent guarantee of entitlements.” In the same vein, Arkes, in *Natural Rights and the Right to Choose*, attacks his fellow Americans for meekly going along with the “recession of privacy and freedom” that oddly coincides with the concurrent “expansion of rights associated with sexual freedom.” What outrages both Arkes and Gottfried here is the democratic choice that voters have made. Many citizens have willingly given up the private right to speak out against abortion and alternate sexual lifestyles while they eagerly accept an increasing level of sexual liberty as compensation for this loss of freedom. This redefinition of “privacy” or “personal freedom” that curiously advances the right to sexual libertinism while restricting the right of citizens to protest against homosexual and feminist rights is supported by what Gottfried calls the “therapeutic state” in his study of multiculturalism. Arkes would heartily share Gottfried’s disdain for a system that uses tax money in order to support the interventions of therapists and doctors who seek to persuade citizens of the importance of unrestricted sexual freedoms.

The considerable similarity between Arkes’s and Gottfried’s critique of the modern state, however, should not conceal the astoundingly distinct assumptions that inform their respective critiques. Arkes, like most Straussians, blames the rise of this state and its popular democratic support on historicism and relativism. The natural right tradition of individual liberty and responsibility is under attack from ideologues on the Left and Right who deny that there is a permanent human nature deserving of respect and protection; these same ideologues embrace the noxious historicist and relativistic notion that the very concept of human nature is constructed by tradition or culture. If human nature has no objective existence, Arkes warns, then the door to social engineering is irrevocably swung open. The state can then justify the practice of abortion and sexual deviance on the grounds that there is no
absolute good that benefits human nature, since no such thing exists in the first place.\textsuperscript{49}

In order to make this argument against historicism and relativism stick, Arkes has to resort to the Straussian premise that the Greek political philosophers understood better than their modern counterparts the dangers of denying a universal good for all of humanity. This classical universalism is the true foundation of the American regime according to Arkes and many other Straussians. Despite the fact that far more Americans read the Bible than the Greek texts around the time of the founding,\textsuperscript{50} Arkes gives the impression that Aristotelian virtues of prudence and moderation are the true verities of the older classical liberalism that informed the minds of both the founders and the American people at large during the Revolutionary period.\textsuperscript{51} Although Arkes is not oblivious to the biblically based arguments that Abraham Lincoln leveled against the institution of slavery (particularly his invocation of the golden rule), he rejects the “postmodern” (historicist, relativist) view that only a few faiths teach the intrinsic dignity of human life. This teaching, Arkes insists, is universal across all cultures, whether biblical or extrabiblical.\textsuperscript{52}

The lengths to which Arkes goes in “universalizing” opposition to abortion does not withstand the withering historicist critique that Gottfried and others have launched against Straussian reinventions of American political thought. As I have argued in my study of Lincoln, this president owes his most important moral credos to the Bible (especially Christian morality), not to Greek texts that he probably never read anyway. Arkes’s selective use of history as the means for advancing his universalism also does not successfully override inconvenient facts that are well-known to any student of history. Despite the alleged universal belief in the dignity of all human life, even Arkes admits in passing that the Greeks (including Aristotle) supported infanticide.\textsuperscript{53} Overall, it is far from clear how Arkes expects a recovery of Greek virtue to help Americans withstand the depredations of the managerial state, particularly when the typical Greek city-state severely restricted the free speech of its citizens as well. Indeed, this is one fact about ancient Athens that Strauss himself acknowledges.\textsuperscript{54}
The fact that Arkes and other Straussians do not attempt to reconcile their universalism with particular history leaves them particularly vulnerable to Gottfried’s critiques. In *Conservatism in America*, Gottfried takes aim at the misguided attempts of Straussians to attack their opponents on the Left and the Right for their lack of moral virtue simply because they doubt the existence of one permanent human nature. In targeting students of Strauss like Harry Jaffa for his preoccupation with the abstract notion of human equality, Gottfried reminds his readers that there is nothing particularly conservative about belief in a universal human nature that grounds this equality, whether one looks at the writings of the European Right or those of the American founding. It is also unfair, Gottfried argues, to equate relativism with immorality or libertinism simply because relativists “deny the possibility of a valid explicit or implicit hierarchy of moral goods that is universally applicable.” Unlike subjectivists who are absolutely committed to the gratification of their individual desires, relativists weigh the importance of some values over others based on changing historical or cultural circumstances. It does not follow that relativists are libertine simply because they question the absolute validity of certain values at a given time.

At times, Gottfried and his Straussian opponents may be closer to agreement over the meaning of relativism than meets the eye, since both camps sometimes concur that relativism is not identical to the permissive tolerance of every point of view or lifestyle. Although Strauss occasionally gives the impression that a defense of historicism and relativism logically leads to the failure to distinguish civilization from cannibalism, no Straussian scholar known to me would consistently accuse leftist relativists of showing excessive levels of tolerance. Willmoore Kendall, a conservative populist admirer of Strauss whose critique of Popper’s open society comes under fire in Gottfried’s book for naively believing in the “tolerance” of the liberal Left, makes it clear in his critique of Popper (and J. S. Mill) that he is not so naïve to confuse openness with tolerance. In Kendall’s view, the
defenders of such openness will likely become intolerant persecutors of anyone who pursues orthodox notions of truth. Given his study of the therapeutic state, Gottfried would hardly dispute Kendall’s worries about the devolution of liberal tolerance into intolerance.

A more serious criticism that Gottfried launches against the Straussian critique of relativism is related to its implications for America’s mission in the world. Gottfried lambastes the work of Strauss’s student Harry Jaffa, who has arguably gone further than any other Straussian in justifying a program of democratic globalism on the basis of a spurious belief in anti-relativistic equality (or worse, “divine revelation”). Jaffa, who portrays Abraham Lincoln as the most brilliant defender of both universal human equality and the mission to spread democracy on a global scale, ignores the historic relativity of his own hermeneutic. As Gottfried argues, Jaffa’s thought fits well into a tradition of Cold War liberalism that pushed for this democratizing mission, a project that the founders and even Lincoln would have found abhorrent. This “political religion” of elevating both democracy and equality as the most important values of our time (and for all time) hits the wall of historic particularity in dramatic ways. Not only does it ignore the flagrant inequality that alleged Greek universalists like Plato and Aristotle accepted as “natural” (especially in the case of slavery), this new secular faith reinvents the American founding as an experiment in universal truths as opposed to the creation of a constitutional republic that was not meant to be universally open to all peoples and faiths. Far from successfully combating the Left over the intrinsic goodness of America, Jaffa has embraced the leftist version of history as the march towards the final achievement of equality. From a historicist perspective, Greek (Platonic) “universalism” is largely a modern reinvention of ancient history that has more to do with the leftist politics of equality in our time than with the basic features of Hellenic city-states. In short, the “eternal” truths to which Jaffa and other Straussians swear allegiance are, ironically, epiphenomena of the twentieth century.
The Universality of Historicism

The practical consequence of this Straussian hermeneutic, according to Gottfried, is the promotion of a pseudo-conservatism (and liberalism) that is ahistorical. It is not just the case that Strauss and his students, in Gottfried’s view, romanticize the Greeks as liberal universalists. In teaching that “nature” rather than “history” is the true guide for political life, Strauss persuaded many figures of the postwar American Right to ignore the specific history of their nation’s tradition while they embraced an erroneously grounded faith in America’s mission to spread her “universal” values far and wide. To be sure, Strauss is not the only postwar rightist to argue that conservatives and liberals in the republic need to appreciate “eternal” truths. Russell Kirk, whose ideas receive more attention than Strauss’s in Gottfried’s Conservatism in America, was also culpable for advancing the cause of the “permanent things,” or eternal values that had presumably been shared by all conservatives throughout history. Even the libertarian historian Murray Rothbard, whom Gottfried credits for properly critiquing Kirk’s “new” conservatism, also stands guilty of erroneously portraying the modern social contract theory as an “eternal” arrangement that harks back to antiquity. Nevertheless, it is clear from Gottfried’s works as a whole that the main responsibility for promoting the cause of democratic universalism lies with Strauss’s students, not with Kirk and Rothbard (both of whom opposed the first Gulf War). Indeed, Kirk’s conservatism of the “permanent things” turned out to be far less permanent than the highly successful revisionist history of Harry Jaffa and other students of Strauss.

As a bourgeois Christian political philosopher, I heartily appreciate the contributions that Gottfried has made towards reminding Americans of their bourgeois Christian past, a project that might well have been unnecessary had the postwar American Right not embraced an ahistorical universalism that allegedly owes nothing to Protestantism. Strauss and his students give little credit to the Christian contribution to political thought in America or the West as a whole when they fail to acknowledge the Protestant influence on the American founding. Gottfried is on solid ground when he
warns of Jaffa’s attempt to replace Christianity with global democracy-building as the preferred creed for combating leftist relativism, particularly when this attempt of Jaffa often ignores the uniquely Protestant origins of American republicanism.\textsuperscript{63} In his work on multiculturalism, Gottfried takes pains to show how the American preoccupation with human rights abroad and behavior modification at home, a two-front war against prejudice, is rooted in Protestant guilt over the suffering of others, even if leftist and rightist supporters of this struggle do not fully understand this specific religious genealogy. At first glance, it may be unfair to accuse Strauss of sharing responsibility for the excesses of certain students of his who are determined to play down America’s Christian heritage (lest it come across as too particular and relative to history) as they justify the democratizing mission of the “universal nation.” As I have argued elsewhere, Strauss was not nearly as enthusiastic about the mission of spreading democracy globally as many of his students.\textsuperscript{64} In his early study of Hegel, even Gottfried admits that Strauss is not necessarily guilty of every effort on the part of his students in dispensing with historical consciousness.\textsuperscript{65}

At times, there are also some family resemblances between Strauss’s and Gottfried’s views on the positive role that Christianity has played in the history of the West. Like Gottfried, Strauss laments the decline of a religious (presumably Christian) education in Western democracies that once taught the old virtues.\textsuperscript{66} Strauss was also no more impressed than Gottfried with the deformation of faith into secularized forms of politics that replaced the old orthodoxy with a progressivist version of belief; neither thinker puts much stock in the idea of progress, the bête noire of conservatism. For this reason, Strauss respected an honest atheist more than “an alleged theist who conceives of God as a symbol” and dismisses the most punitive features of the deity in favor of a cheap, liberal sentimentalist theology.\textsuperscript{67} Both men are dismissive of the leftist turn in theology in the twentieth century that transformed God into a cosmic defender of statist social engineering, minus the tough biblical morality of humility and self-denial that once characterized the orthodox faith. (This theological turn is a central focus of
Gottfried’s study of multiculturalism.) Yet Strauss ultimately never develops these provocative claims, nor does he abandon his highly dubious position that true political universalism originates within classical Greek political philosophy. Whatever good remains of the modern West, Strauss believes, is due to the persistent influence of this tradition.

Gottfried’s longstanding critique of universalism has powerfully exposed the defective understanding of historical particularity that his Straussian opponents have often manifested. Yet Gottfried’s own qualified respect for the now extinct bourgeois Christian democratic regime raises a handful of large self-referential questions about his own historicism. Does he admire this regime because of its universal ethic or in spite of it? If he admires its universalism, does this attitude contradict his historicist opposition to the same? Alternately, if he treats this regime as good only in a relative sense, on what grounds can he claim that it is better than any other? Strauss himself might well have raised these questions about Gottfried in a manner that is reminiscent of his critique of historicists who assume an “ahistorical” moral vantage point in order to understand what is “true” about history. Strauss always insisted that historicists abide by their own standards. “Historicism is not a cab which one stops at his convenience. Historicism must be applied to itself.”68

As we have seen, Gottfried laments the passing of the bourgeois Christian ethos and accordingly targets both the postwar Left and Right for advancing its demise by supporting the managerial state that curbs the old liberal freedoms in favor of either leftist projects for behavior modification or rightist dreams of global democracy. In his essay “Sinful Wasps,” Gottfried also qualifies his opposition to the Protestant guilt and self-hatred that is at the core of political correctness by reminding his readers that the old Protestant order greatly benefited humanity, not least because it has taken responsibility for its own sins as well as the suffering of others. “They (Protestants) have also made available to the rest of humanity the fruits of their economic productivity, high health standards, educational institutions, and aid to underdeveloped
From a typically historicist vantage point, however, why should one praise the bourgeois Protestants for being superior to other civilizations in taking responsibility for their past sins and in helping the rest of the world in tandem? If all values are historically relative, why are these values any better or worse than those of other civilizations? If every democracy is simply “the practice of a historical community,” how do we distinguish a “good” democracy from a “bad” one on a historicist basis?

I am not denying that Gottfried takes values seriously. In After Liberalism, Gottfried contended that his opposition to “self-evident” truths does not logically lead to the denial of any moral truth. In the same volume, he even faulted critics of the managerial state for reducing all values to mere instruments of power. In Conservatism in America, he also affirms his commitment to values while disputing a hierarchy of values that privileges certain universal credos over others in a distorted hierarchy that ignores history and culture. In short, Gottfried retains values that he believes are clearly superior to those of his opponents, even though he refrains from universalizing these values on a global scale. My question is this: How can the superiority of these values be demonstrated on the historicist criteria that all values are subject to mere context or historic mutation?

In the conclusion to his study of Carl Schmitt, Gottfried briefly addresses these self-referential issues when he qualifies his historicism by distinguishing moral universalism from political universalism. In his discussion of Edmund Burke’s famous attack on Lord Warren Hastings’ crimes as governor of the Indian protectorate of Bengal, he quotes with apparent approval Burke’s attack on Hastings’s cynically relativistic view that Western standards of justice did not apply to Indian society. Burke accused Hastings of violating “eternal laws of justice” that apply to both Britain and India. Yet Gottfried quickly points out that Burke’s moral universalism here did not lead this distinguished British parliamentarian to embrace political universalism or the belief that “all peoples should be governed by the same institutions.” Presumably, one can believe that certain crimes (e.g., corruption) are wrong under all
circumstances while believing in a “pluriverse” of different regimes for different peoples (as Burke and Schmitt had). Although I do not dispute the accuracy of Gottfried’s interpretation of Burke’s two positions, I wonder how a historicist can accept moral universalism while repudiating political universalism. Would a consistent historicist be comfortable with either version of universalism?

In my view, Gottfried has rightly questioned the neoconservative ideology of spreading human rights and other democratic ideals on the grounds that it often leads to costly and destructive interventions by Western democracies into howling wildernesses that are not ready for democratic values. In a comparison of Strauss with Hans Morgenthau, Gottfried praises the “realism” of Morgenthau’s Hobbesian view of power politics that disdains the democratic crusades so dear to Woodrow Wilson and his numerous heirs. Yet this position simply constitutes an opposition to the forcible imposition of so-called eternal values; it does not logically follow that these values lack “eternal” importance in the first place. When President Calvin Coolidge spoke eloquently of the “finality” of the Declaration of Independence in a speech given a day after Independence Day in 1926, in opposition to progressivists who believed that this great document had been made obsolete by the march of history after 1776, he never implied that it was the mission of America to spread these values by force of arms around the world. Coolidge, who supported a humble foreign policy of non-intervention except where the republic’s self-preservation was at stake, warned its progressivist critics that the denial of the Declaration’s “truth” constituted a movement backwards in time, “when there was no equality, no rights of the individual, no rule of the people.” In short, Coolidge embraced the absolute morality of this founding document without denying its specific nature as a thoroughly modern text without precedent in previous historical periods. In the president’s mind, there was no contradiction between recognizing the force of history and believing in the absolute value of liberty. This classical liberal president presented the paradox of an absolutely true document that emerged only in modern history.
A consistent historicist could not accept any claim to finality or absolute truth in the spirit in which Coolidge describes the Declaration. As Sam Francis admitted in his study of James Burnham, the pioneer of the elite theory approach to politics that has influenced both his work as well as Gottfried’s, an exclusive emphasis on the relativity of values can leave one vulnerable to the charge that ethics has no place in politics. Neccessarily to say, Gottfried never takes a value-neutral approach to politics in any of his writings. His approval of Burke’s attack on Hastings indicates that he believes in a moral critique of political power. In the same work (on Carl Schmitt), Gottfried deplores the assumption of Anglo-Saxon “uniqueness” that has led to democratic imperialism in the twentieth century. His critique of the arrogance of power in his various writings on Strauss, neoconservatism, and the cultural Left clearly stems from an absolute stance on morality. In Conservatism in America, Gottfried does not object to Locke’s belief in a natural human equality so much as he opposes the neoconservative adulteration of Locke as a defender of universal values that must be exported to the rest of the world; a democracy that “manufactures a consensus by which others are made to live” is just as illegitimate as the imposition of consensus by fascists or communists. Yet it is not hard to spy the semblance of a universal standard of morality here. Gottfried opposes the imperialist redesign of the world, whether it takes on a fascist, communist, or democratic form. Based on the weight of the historical record, Gottfried believes that democratic imperialism has caused far more harm than good. Out of his understanding of history, however, Gottfried has culled a fairly consistent principle of anti-imperialism. If this principle is as absolute as I believe it is, then it is hard to reconcile Gottfried’s historicism with this stance. A consistent historicist, after all, would merely weigh the pros and cons of imperialism on the basis of context alone while opposing universalisms under all circumstances. Gottfried embraces this pure historicism on some occasions in his writings when, for example, he deplores how a Kantian ethic of universal moral laws (essentially the golden rule) directly leads to an intrusive system of international law that
punishes alleged violators of human rights.\textsuperscript{79} Once again, it is unclear (at least to me) how a moral universalism leads automatically to a political universalism. Ultimately, Gottfried reveals his implicit moral universalism when he exposes hypocrisy on the post-war Right: the double standard of both neoconservatives and value-conservatives who accuse their opponents of amoral relativism while conveniently denying the historical relativity of their own “eternally” valid ideals. Gottfried’s opposition to this rhetorical ruse that justifies democratic imperialism in the name of anti-relativism is a powerful manifestation of a universal opposition to all ideological attempts to justify imperialism, not the markings of a pure historicist. Unlike Strauss’s students, Gottfried is more willing to acknowledge the historic specificity of this universal morality. In the process of admiring bourgeois morality, however, Gottfried himself is compelled to admire at times the moral universalism of this civilization.

\textbf{The Historicity of Universalism}

A pure ahistorical universalism suffers from the opposite problem posed by a pure historicism. Just as a pure historicist cannot theoretically account for a universalist morality, a pure universalist cannot explain how massive differences over moral belief arise among civilizations, even those with comparable historic origins. Even though Strauss insists that “the fundamentals of justice are, in principle, accessible to man as man,”\textsuperscript{80} he is ultimately compelled to prefer one civilization over another if universalism is more prevalent in one. Strauss, after all, clearly admires Anglo-Saxon hegemony and its attendant bourgeois values of moderation and respect for the rule of law (notwithstanding his critique of Burke). One irony here may be that Strauss the universalist is actually less opposed to historicity and identity than meets the eye. What is doubly ironic is that both Strauss and Gottfried admire the modern bourgeois West for a universalism that is historically specific to that civilization.

Perhaps the most serious pitfall of a purely ahistorical approach to political philosophy is that it has led to an imaginative historical
revisionism with respect to the heroes of the Straussian pantheon. For example, Strauss and his students praise both Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill as exceptional modern statesmen who embodied the old classical virtues. Since I have written extensively on the defects of the Straussian portrayal of Lincoln elsewhere, I shall confine my thoughts to the subject of Churchill. As Gottfried correctly observes, Harry Jaffa and his students have gone particularly far in extolling Churchill as an exemplar of democratic statesmanship. Although it is not obvious that Strauss would have shared Jaffa’s enthusiasm for global democracy-building, it is beyond doubt that Strauss set the tone for the enthusiastic celebration of Churchill among his students. From World War II onwards, Strauss consistently praised both Churchill and English civilization for standing up against German “nihilism” as it was infamously embodied by Hitler’s Nazis. This “nihilistic” desire to undermine all that is good in modern (liberal) civilization was the most dangerous manifestation of Nazism. Strauss lamented the fact that the young German men who had become seduced by Hitler into believing that “communist world revolution” was the inevitable outcome of the Enlightenment and everything modern (“the jump into liberty”) could have benefitted from the manly example of Churchill who appealed to the classical virtue of courage in the face of defeat after Dunkirk. The best ideals of modern civilization, Strauss contended, were the English ideals of moderation and prudence that were lost on the “uncompromising” German mind. The English avoidance of the “radical breaks with traditions which played such a role on the continent” in fact constituted the last best hope of preserving the premodern approach to statecraft, the true “classical ideal of humanity.” Strauss’s famous eulogy on behalf of Churchill, which he delivered in a seminar soon after the statesman’s death in 1965, also praised the “true greatness” of this “indomitable and magnanimous statesman” who stood alone (in 1940) against the “insane tyrant” Hitler. Once again, it is clear that Strauss is praising him as a leader in the true classical vein, a tack that Jaffa and other Straussians have followed as well. As Gottfried astutely observes, Strauss’s celebration of Churchill and
the English has inspired students like Jaffa and Bloom to fear the “Rightwing Teutonic critics of democratic equality” as the greatest threat to the American creed today.84 To my knowledge, neither Strauss nor any of his students seeks to justify the paradox of a historically specific civilization (Anglo-American) being the sole modern locale for a universalistic understanding of statecraft.

Although Strauss constantly insists that great philosophers and statesmen need to be understood on their own terms, without revisionist adulteration of their ideas (which, he believed, historicists are inclined to do),85 it is not obvious that he and his students have applied this respectful hermeneutic to Churchill. In fact, it is highly dubious that the English prime minister would have understood himself to be the Hellenic hero that Straussian portray him to be. His interest in Greek texts was fleeting at best, and on at least one occasion he pointedly singled out Christian ethics as superior to the classical Greek version, which justified slavery.86 While Churchill pointedly rejected the most naïve version of the idea of progress, especially after the horrors of world war, he no more rejected progress in toto than Coolidge had. Churchill, like Strauss, remained a political liberal throughout his adult life, but his liberalism was perfectly compatible with the cautious belief that humanity had made some progress, not least of which was the Christian teaching of moral universalism and its related opposition to the presence of slavery. Unlike the Straussian Churchill who seeks to preserve “premodern” virtues, the real Churchill is an unabashed modern who is intent on preserving progress from its excesses.

Since Gottfried is critical of the “Churchill cult” among Straussians, it is ironic that the statesman’s political thought is closer in spirit to Gottfried than it is to his admirer Strauss. Given Churchill’s famous admiration for Burke, it is not a stretch to portray him as receptive to “historicist” thinking. Churchill, who believed that English civilization had been most adept in spreading the rule of law and constitutional democracy throughout the world, never spoke of these principles as “eternal” or “natural” values. As an historian, Churchill knew only too well that some civilizations were more inclined towards moderation than others. Gottfried,
whom we have seen praise bourgeois Christian civilization for being more liberal than that of the Greeks, endorses a cautious version of historic progress that is not markedly different from either Churchill or the most conservative Hegelians.

Strauss, as we have seen, privileges English civilization above the German on the basis of the historical record. This choice between peoples raises a couple of large questions about the consistency of his anti-historicist critique. If only a few civilizations can achieve true liberty and stability, then what exactly is “natural” about the rise and triumph of liberalism itself? Indeed, what is wrong with historicist or progressivist thinking if history teaches that some civilizations are better than others? To be sure, Strauss occasionally admits that some nations may have a greater “natural fitness for political excellence than others.” 87 Without resorting to the record of historical change, however, it is hard to explain this difference on the basis of an abstraction like nature. It is also impossibly difficult to make sense of liberalism’s success as a political ideology if one portrays it, as we have seen in Strauss’s writings, as a doctrine of eternal truths that harks all the way back to the Greeks. Not only is this a position that Churchill rejects given his contempt for ancient slavery and praise for Christian ethics, it is also a position which even Straussian liberals have to repudiate if they are to praise the English achievement of liberty that took hold long after Socrates and Plato.

Strauss may well respond that Churchill’s rhetoric in favor of progress and Christianity is just that—rhetoric. In fact, he was fond of quoting Churchill’s famous phrase that moderns build on “low and solid ground” to illustrate the necessity of defending high virtues on the low rhetorical ground of progress. Yet it is not obvious, once again, that Churchill would have been so dismissive of this ideal. Given his cautious embrace of progress, Churchill does not fit into the “value-conservative” mold that Gottfried attributes to Strauss and his followers. Nor does this statesman fit into the stereotypical progressivist mold that Strauss easily debunks in his writings. As we have seen, Strauss clearly believes that one is either an historicist or a universalist. If one is an historicist, even a
progressivist historicist, one ends up justifying in relativistic terms the most horrible acts perpetrated in history. Strauss certainly pressed this point against Kojève in their famous debate over Xenophon’s *Hiero*. As Gottfried might well agree, the fact that Churchill thought in historical terms hardly makes him a defender of every sort of regime, in light of his opposition to Nazism and communism. In short, Churchill, the principal hero of the Straussian pantheon of statesmen, presents a paradox that is incomprehensible on Straussian terms: a modern statesman who opposes tyranny and defends bourgeois civilization on the basis of liberalism and historical progress.

**Conclusion**

Although both Strauss and Gottfried genuinely admire the old bourgeois order, only Gottfried appreciates this order on its own uniquely historic and religious terms. The fact that Gottfried usually distrusts universal claims applied to politics does not deter him from admiring the universal morality of the bourgeois West as a civilizing influence in history. Strauss and his students by contrast are so determined to reject any “historicist” claim of changeable mores that they defend bourgeois civilization based on a romanticized version of ancient Greek universalism (as articulated by Plato and Aristotle) that no defender of this order, not even Churchill, would have recognized as his own. Within this critique, however, lies the occasional qualification on the part of Strauss that some civilizations are more historically adept than others in defending decency and the rule of law. Even if the “eternal” values of bourgeois Christianity are specific to its own civilization, despite the claims of various value-conservatives influenced by Strauss, that does not mean this order is unworthy of defense against its enemies at home and abroad. Indeed, its historic and religious specificity should serve to remind conservatives and liberals all the more about the fragility of the civilization that they both cherish.

Grant Havers
Notes

1. I am grateful to Peter Minowitz for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this paper.


4. See my “Leo Strauss’s Influence on George Grant,” in *Athens and Jerusalem: George Grant’s Theology, Philosophy, and Politics*, ed. Ian Angus, Ron Dart, and Randy Peg Peters (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 124–135.


22. Gottfried, *Conservatism in America*, 72–73. Although neoconservatives accept the basic premise of value-conservatives that values are eternal, it does not follow that value-conservatives always support the spread of democratic ideals or equate these with eternal values. Russell Kirk, for example, was a value-conservative who opposed democratic universalism. See Gottfried, *Conservatism in America*, 21.


37. For Strauss’s thoughts on Spengler, see his *The City and Man*, 2–3.


44. Strauss, “Progress or Return?” in An Introduction to Political Philosophy, 273. I discuss the philosophical and political implications of Strauss’s famous Athens-Jerusalem distinction in “Between Athens and Jerusalem: Western Otherness in the Thought of Leo Strauss and Hannah Arendt,” The European Legacy 9-1 (February 2004), 19–29.


46. Gottfried, After Liberalism, x.


48. Arkes, Natural Rights, 8.

49. Arkes, Natural Rights, 11–33.

50. See Clinton Rossiter, Seedtime of the Republic: The Origin of the American Tradition of Political Liberty (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1953), 356. Rossiter notes that Plato “was virtually ignored” during the Revolutionary period, while the American colonists relied heavily on the Bible for guidance.


52. Arkes, Natural Rights, 3, 17.

53. Arkes, Natural Rights, 139.


55. Gottfried, Conservatism in America, 100.


60. Gottfried, Conservatism in America, 17.


70. Gottfried, *Conservatism in America*, 83.


75. Coolidge, quoted in Arkes, *Natural Rights*, 24–25. Although Arkes supports Coolidge’s praise of the Declaration, it is not obvious that Strauss would do the same. See his critique of what he considers the contradictory nature of a progressivist belief in universal ideals in *What Is Political Philosophy?*, 66.


77. Gottfried, *Carl Schmitt*, 4, 76.


83. Strauss, “Churchill’s Greatness,” *The Weekly Standard* 5, no. 16 (January 10, 2000). Strauss also praises Churchill’s biography of his ancestor, the Duke of Marlborough, as “the greatest historical work written in our century, an inexhaustible mine of political wisdom and understanding.”


